



ST. MARY'S 2050

CHARTING OUR TOMORROW

February 2026 | Public Review Draft

Note to reader: The cover for this plan is currently being designed.

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Introduction

In This Section

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- About the Plan
- St. Mary's 2050: Our Vision
- Engaging the Public
- Alignment with Maryland State Requirements
- How to Use the Plan
- Plan Framework
- Plan Monitoring Process



Background

Situated along the Chesapeake Bay, St. Mary's County is a vibrant community rooted in traditions of agricultural stewardship and maritime economies alongside modern defense industries. Water-based recreation and maritime economies along with the Naval Air Station Patuxent River (NAS Pax) attract new residents and visitors alike. The resulting high quality of life and natural beauty found here has manifested in an identity of St. Mary's as an excellent historic peninsula county.

Relatively isolated from the pressures of growth experienced in the Baltimore and Washington D.C. metropolitan areas, visitors from these areas are drawn to St. Mary's County's rural farms and forests, waterfront property, and recreational access along the creeks, rivers, and coves that stretch along the county.

Thousands of new residents have been attracted to this quality of life, causing population to grow by 45% between 1995 and 2020. With a projected population increase of 34% from 2020 to 2045, this plan serves as a guide to planning for intentional growth while maintaining our community character.

This chapter provides an overview of the development of the plan, the vision themes to achieve to ensure St. Mary's County continues as an excellent place to live for current and future residents.

About the Plan

Purpose of the Plan

The St. Mary's 2050 Plan establishes a countywide comprehensive vision for the future of the community that reflects resident input and considers the needs of the county's future population. This plan is an update to the comprehensive plan that was adopted in 2010 and is required by Title 3 of the Land Use Article for the *Annotated Code of Maryland*.

The Comprehensive Plan is a long-range (20+ years) policy document centered around physical planning, including land use, natural resource conservation, public infrastructure, housing, and economic development.

It is built from extensive community engagement and serves as a guide to direct growth and support preservation efforts in the county. Implementation of the plan takes place through:

- Leveraging its policy guidance to inform decisions on proposed developments;
- Preparing updates to the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance and related ordinances;
- Coordination with other important entities that influence growth, such as NAS Pax, MetCom, and the Town of Leonardtown; and
- Other actions that identify projects and programs that help implement the

vision for St. Mary's County included in the Implementation Chapter.

The Plan Process

All communities change over time, and the community planning framework is a continuous cycle that begins with identifying a long-term vision and developing policy guidance through the Comprehensive Plan. Following this, the community identifies shorter-term priorities such as strategic plans and departmental work plans to support established long-term visions and policies.

Using these plans, the County can identify funding priorities to support implementation of the Comprehensive Plan through the County's annual budget and capital improvement plan. Implementation can come in the form of new planning initiatives, projects, and regulatory updates that align with policies identified in the Comprehensive Plan. The County can then assess implementation efforts to measure and evaluate progress and identify where headway is being made and priorities that are falling short. The framework then starts again with an update to the comprehensive plan every 10 years.



Plan Phases and Key Deliverables

This Comprehensive Plan was developed through a systematic four-phase planning framework spanning approximately 22 months. The framework was a collaboration between the County and community residents and partner agencies to identify key issues, evaluate required planning topics, and establish a shared vision for the community's future.

Phase One: Launch Project (Months 1-2)

The initial phase established the foundation for the planning framework by organizing project resources, gathering baseline information, and preparing for public engagement. The project team established the project framework and created accessible branding and communication materials.

Phase Two: Establish the Vision and Goals (Months 3-5)

Phase Two focused on understanding current conditions and trends while launching the first major community engagement effort. The planning team

analyzed existing policies, developed projections for future growth and needs, and supported Community Engagement Window #1 that gathered public input on community values and priorities for the future.

Phase Three: Develop Policies and Strategies (Months 6-18)

The longest and most intensive phase translated community vision and technical analysis into concrete goals, policies, and implementation actions. It kicked off with Community Engagement Window #2 that provided an opportunity for residents to share their opinions on key policy choices. Draft plan chapters were then developed and a final Community Engagement Window #3 provided the opportunity for public review and refinement prior to the formal adoption process.

Phase Four: Adopt the Plan (Months 19-22)

Note to reader: This phase has not yet begun. The final phase will support formal adoption through a structured review and hearing procedure with the Planning Commission and Commissioners of St.



Mary's County. This phase will include a public work session to discuss the plan in detail, followed by public hearings providing opportunities for final public comment and official action.

Throughout all phases, the planning framework emphasized transparency, thorough analysis, and meaningful public

participation. Over 1,000 community members participated in engagement activities, and the plan benefited from input from diverse participants including residents, business owners, community organizations, and public agencies. The result is a comprehensive plan that reflects the community's priorities.



St. Mary's 2050: Our Vision

Leveraging the community conversations and feedback provided during the St. Mary's 2050 planning framework, three vision themes emerged.

Vision Theme 1: Guiding Our Growth Through 2050

Through the creation of the St. Mary's 2050 plan, St. Mary's County seeks to reinforce the balance between preserving important environmental and agricultural resources, and growing intentionally to create attractive, walkable, and connected places within designated Growth Areas. This balance will continue to provide living, working, and recreating environments for a variety of lifestyles. St. Mary's 2050 identifies areas where certain development types are appropriate and desirable, such as areas for high-tech business parks and mixed-use centers, traditional neighborhoods, retirement communities, rural farmsteads, and waterfront areas. Creating these distinct spaces helps to ensure the sustainability of St. Mary's County by providing a diverse economic base with job opportunities at all income levels, and by encouraging investments in housing to serve the diverse needs of the community.

Vision Theme 2: Protecting Our Environmental and Agricultural Resources

The County's wealth of natural assets are critical elements of its heritage, economy, and quality of life. The St. Mary's 2050 Plan prioritizes protection of land and water resources that support multiple community planning objectives. Implementation of these objectives will protect lands to maintain natural ecosystem functions. It will also protect the County's unique rural character and strengthen its agricultural economy. Investments in parks and open spaces will enhance livability for residents and visitors, and shoreline resiliency efforts will address vulnerability to hazards such as erosion, storm surge mitigation, and nuisance flooding.

Vision Theme 3: Serving Our Community

Maintaining a high quality of life means ensuring residents have access to effective and efficient County facilities and services. The St. Mary's 2050 plan envisions that resources are available to all residents in a manner that is consistent with the urban, suburban, or rural context where they are located. New or enhanced services and facilities should support a healthy fiscal bottom line for the County. Core services, such as public water and sewer, should be

prioritized within Growth Areas. The County's transportation network should be improved to support priority multimodal access needs (drive, bike, walk, transit, etc.) of the community.

Human services, public health, public safety, and other public services should be enhanced through strategic improvements that promote the wellbeing of all County residents.



Engaging the Public

The comprehensive planning framework prioritized meaningful community engagement to ensure residents' voices shaped the county's future vision. Three distinct Community Engagement Windows (CEW) provided multiple opportunities for participation throughout the project.

Community Engagement Window #1 took place from Mid January to the beginning of March 2025, inviting all community members to participate in shaping their county's future. This initial engagement phase centered around 12 Community Visioning Sessions, with ten held in-person and two conducted virtually. During these sessions, participants completed comprehensive surveys, engaged in small group discussions, and participated in hands-on mapping activities to identify priorities

and concerns. For those unable to attend the sessions, online visioning activities were available.

Community Engagement Window #2 ran from Mid May through the end of June. This phase focused on gathering feedback through three targeted surveys, made available both online and in person at 15 community events. These events included established gatherings such as the Southern Maryland Heritage Festival at Historic Sotterley and the Community, Culture & Cuisine event in Lexington Park, bringing the planning framework directly to residents in familiar community settings.

Community Engagement Window #3

Note to reader: This phase is currently underway. A section describing this phase of engagement will be included in the final plan.

Key Planning Themes

The community engagement activities revealed consistent priorities and concerns that emerged as central planning themes. Community Engagement Window #1 identified six primary areas of focus that resonated strongly with participants:

- Environmental Protection and Rural Preservation
- Housing and Growth Management
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Economic Diversification and Small Business Support
- Community Services and Quality of Life
- Public Safety and Governance

In addition to these themes, specific community priorities within each major area were identified. Rural heritage

emerged as a particularly strong value, with residents expressing both appreciation for and determination to preserve the county's agricultural landscapes, scenic views, and cultural identity. Environmental stewardship priorities focused specifically on protecting vulnerable shoreline areas, wetlands, and other sensitive natural resources from inappropriate development pressures.

Balanced growth management emerged as a community priority, with residents supporting strategic redevelopment and new development in designated Growth Areas while simultaneously protecting rural areas from sprawl. This balanced approach reflects the community's understanding that growth can be beneficial when properly managed and located.





Transportation improvements represented both immediate needs and long-term vision, with community members identifying several specific priorities:

- Enhanced walking and biking infrastructure, including both destination connectivity and recreational trails;
- Improved public transportation options for both local trips and regional connections; and
- Strategic roadway network improvements to address existing safety concerns and traffic congestion.

Housing diversity and affordability emerged as challenges requiring comprehensive solutions. The community recognized the need for attainable housing options that serve residents throughout all their life stages. Participants emphasized the importance of providing varied housing types within Growth Areas, understanding that housing diversity supports workforce attraction and retention, including essential employees who serve the community.

Infrastructure capacity, particularly wastewater treatment expansion and improvement in specific county areas, was identified as foundational for supporting appropriate growth while maintaining environmental protection standards.

Alignment with Maryland State Requirements

Alignment with Maryland's Sustainable Growth Planning Principles

In April 2025, Governor Wes Moore signed into law the eight Sustainable Growth Planning Principles for Maryland. These principles update and consolidate the previous 12 Planning Visions, outlined in Maryland's 2009 Planning Visions law, marking the state's transition from Smart Growth to Sustainable Growth approaches. This updated framework

emphasizes a more holistic approach to land use and development by balancing economic, social, and environmental considerations across generations.

St. Mary's 2050 aligns with the Sustainable Growth approach. Each principle is listed below with an explanation of how this plan supports it.

Land: St. Mary's 2050 promotes the preservation of agricultural lands and forests while directing growth toward established communities with adequate infrastructure already in place.



Transportation: St. Mary's 2050 emphasizes developing transportation systems that provide efficient, affordable access to employment centers, residential areas, and essential services.

Housing: St. Mary's 2050 encourages diverse housing options at various price points to meet the needs of residents across all income levels.

Economy: St. Mary's 2050 facilitates flexible development approaches, including repurposing existing structures and supporting mixed-use projects that adapt to evolving economic conditions.

Equity: St. Mary's 2050 has prioritized inclusive community engagement, ensuring that marginalized populations have meaningful input in shaping the county's future, and will continue this commitment throughout the implementation process.

Resilience: St. Mary's 2050 incorporates strategies to prepare for and mitigate both environmental hazards and human-

caused disruptions that could affect local communities.

Place: St. Mary's 2050 values the creation and maintenance of community gathering spaces while protecting the county's historic sites and natural landscapes.

Ecology: St. Mary's 2050 commits to safeguarding environmentally sensitive areas and maintaining the health of the county's forests, farms, waterfront and riparian areas, and water resources.

Plan Element Compliance

Title 3 of the Land Use Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland requires comprehensive plans to address specific topics to guide local growth and development. St. Mary's 2050 incorporates all required topics, organized into elements that reflect the County's planning priorities and local context. Table 1 below demonstrates how the Plan's elements align with state requirements.



Table 1: Plan Element Compliance

Requirement	Chapter(s) in St. Mary's 2050
Community Facilities	Public Facilities and Infrastructure Element
Areas of Critical State Concern	Environment and Natural Resources Element (Sensitive Areas & Critical Areas of State Concern subsection)
Goals and Objectives	Integrated throughout all elements
Housing	Housing Element
Land Use	Growth Management Element
Development Regulations	Growth Management Element
Sensitive Areas	Environment and Natural Resources Element (Sensitive Areas & Critical Areas of State Concern subsection)
Transportation	Transportation Element
Water Resources Element	Public Infrastructure and Facilities Element (Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater subsection) Environment and Natural Resources Element (Water Resources subsection)
Mineral Resources	Economic Development Element (Mineral Resources subsection)
Fisheries	Economic Development Element (Fisheries subsection)

How to Use the Plan

The Plan is organized into eight elements:

- Growth Management
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Environment and Natural Resources
- Transportation
- Public Facilities and Infrastructure
- Public Health and Community Services
- Natural Hazards, Vulnerability, and Resiliency Element

Each planning element has its own Goals, Policies, and Actions in the following chapters.

The **Glossary of Planning Terms** is provided in the Appendix.

Plan Framework

Each chapter is organized into three components: Goals, Policies, and Actions.

Goals describe desired outcomes related and are guided by the Vision Themes and articulate a more specific result to be achieved.

Policies are statements of commitment and direction aimed at achieving corresponding Goals. These describe positions to inform decision-making either by the County or a partner agency.

Actions are specific tasks that will be taken to achieve the Vision.



Plan Monitoring Process

Monitoring and reporting of the St. Mary's 2050 Plan should be an ongoing process that includes status updates on plan implementation to the public at regular intervals. It is good planning practice to report on implementation on a regular basis, as required by §§1-207 and 1-208 of the Land Use Article of the *Annotated Code of Maryland*.

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Growth Management Element

In This Section

[Planning for Balanced Growth](#)

[Planning Areas Framework](#)

[Land Use Map](#)

[Goals, Policies, and Actions](#)



Planning for Balanced Growth

For generations, St. Mary's County has balanced growth with preservation, maintaining its distinctive blend of thriving communities, working farms and shorelines, natural beauty, and small-town character. The County's rural heritage, connection to early American history, waterfront access, strong sense of place, and high-paying employment opportunities generated by defense and related industries have made it an attractive location for families, businesses, and visitors alike. Data, maps, graphics, and other details about local and regional trends can be found in the Trends and Projections report on the [St. Mary's 2050 project website](#). The increasing costs of providing local public services and desired new quality of life amenities such as parks and trails require additional tax revenue, which can be generated through growth. Maintaining balanced growth in a desirable community like St. Mary's County is an ever-increasing challenge influenced by national, regional, and local trends.

National and Regional Trends

Exurban Growth Pressure and Population Trends

Nationally, exurban communities (places on the outskirts of major metropolitan areas) are among the fastest growing communities in the nation. With remote working, living preferences that took hold during the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasing housing affordability challenges, suburban and even rural communities are now seeing more growth pressure than in previous decades. St. Mary's County, located within a one-to-two-hour commute from both the Washington, DC and Baltimore metropolitan areas, is experiencing this exurban growth pressure as evidenced by the new development occurring at the

northern end and other parts of the county.

While St. Mary's County is experiencing population growth, Maryland as a whole is slowly losing residents. According to the Comptroller of Maryland's Housing & The Economy Report, Maryland has lost 2.5 million residents since 2010 as a result of out-migration to several key states: Florida, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Delaware. Many communities in these states provide more affordable housing options than are found in Maryland. The share of domestic out-migration from residents making less than \$50K has increased substantially since 2020, from 2% of the net migration loss 2011-2019 to 27% of the net migration loss 2020-2022. While natural population growth and immigrants coming to Maryland from outside the U.S. are largely filling the population gap

created by domestic out-migration, Maryland is still ranked in the top 10 states across the nation for largest net loss of residents to domestic migration. This results in a reduction of the local workforce and impacts economic and business development efforts across the state.

Attainable Housing Challenge

In recent years, the national housing crisis has challenged the ability of states and local governments to achieve balanced growth, and this housing challenge is also impacting St. Mary's County. While the median household income in 2023 for the County (\$114,000) was higher than the state's (\$108,200), a large proportion of local workers earn low wages that make it unaffordable to own or rent a home in St. Mary's County. This not only affects households earning the lowest incomes, but also aging residents on fixed incomes, younger workers, and families wanting to relocate to the area. Public service workers, such as teachers, firefighters, police, and nurses, are finding it ever more challenging to afford to live near where they work. This is further exacerbated by older generations of homeowners that are living longer in their homes and not selling to new homebuyers, the conversion of houses to short-term rentals that reduce year-round housing stock, and the increasing costs of land and construction to build new units. These challenges with the cost and supply of local housing impact the

community's ability to support housing for local workers and families.

Intentional Growth

Approach

As the County grows, an intentional approach is needed to address national and regional growth trends and preserve what residents value most about the county. This chapter establishes a framework for directing growth to locations where infrastructure and services can efficiently support new homes and businesses. At the same time, it protects agricultural lands, environmental resources, and the rural character that define St. Mary's County.

It is also important to be intentional about the fiscal impacts of new development. Currently, the County's private property tax generation is 85% residential and 15% nonresidential. Supporting development of commercial and industrial development in appropriately zoned lands in Growth Areas can help generate revenues needed to address the growing costs to provide public services and maintain public facilities.

The policies and actions that follow reflect community priorities and provide guidance for land use decisions, capital investments, and development patterns that will sustain the County's quality of life for generations to come.

Existing Growth Areas

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan established a three-tiered approach to managing growth: Growth Areas, Rural Areas, and Protected Areas. Growth Areas include the Development Districts, Town Centers, and Village Centers. These locations are designated to accommodate the majority of new residential and commercial development. Rural areas include Rural Preservation, Rural Service Center, and Rural Commercial Limited designations, designed to maintain agricultural land and low-density development. Protected Areas include the Resource Protection Area and Neighborhood Conservation Districts, maintaining these areas as environmentally sensitive lands and established neighborhoods.

During the St. Mary's 2050 planning framework, residents shared strong support (91%) for continuing this tiered approach to managing growth. The challenge is finding the right balance between protecting rural character, supporting economic and housing development, and maintaining community character, while ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with new growth.

Key Findings from Public Engagement

The growth management policies and actions in this chapter were developed through community engagement and

analysis of current conditions in St. Mary's County.

The following key findings from the engagement activity have informed the policies and actions that follow in this section.

Growth and Rural Preservation

The County's Identity and Development Pressure

St. Mary's County's identity is deeply rooted in its rural character that distinguishes it from the more urbanized areas of the region, including the working farms, open spaces, waterfront access, and small-town atmosphere. At the same time, the county faces development pressure and the need to provide housing and economic opportunities for current and future residents. When asked what was important to protect about the county's rural and agricultural landscape, respondents identified agricultural land preservation, preserving historic barns and incentivizing their reuse, promoting agritourism and farm experiences, and limiting encroachment from development to maintain agriculture as a viable industry in St. Mary's County.

Focusing Growth in Appropriate Locations

The community vision emphasized responsible growth that maintains rural character by focusing development within existing Growth Areas instead of sprawling into rural areas. Participants called for limiting large subdivisions and

high-density housing in rural zones, prioritizing revitalization of underutilized properties in Growth Areas rather than new development, and investing in infrastructure improvements without over-urbanizing the county. While some residents expressed concerns about growth happening anywhere, and others felt that the county cannot accommodate more growth and development than has already occurred, most participants supported a measured and intentional approach to growth in specific areas, particularly the Development Districts and Town Centers. Efforts to curb development of repetitive commercial uses, such as convenience retail centers and gas stations, is also important to the community. The key is ensuring that growth does not compromise the qualities that make St. Mary's County distinctive.

Concerns About Growth Rates and Locations

Interactive mapping activities revealed concerns about ongoing levels of residential and commercial growth, especially in Charlotte Hall and Lexington Park. Some participants called to halt new development in specific areas like Lexington Park, Leonardtown, and Myrtle Point Peninsula, while others suggested focusing on infill and redevelopment rather than new construction in rural areas. On the contrary, other community members expressed a desire to see growth concentrated in the Lexington

Park, Leonardtown, and California areas to limit growth in rural areas. The majority of respondents (78%) identified growth within the designated Growth Areas, particularly the Development Districts and Town Centers, as appropriate places for future development and redevelopment. The consistent theme was balancing growth with adequate infrastructure investments and preserving the county's local character.

Preventing Sprawl

Community participants emphasized the importance of preventing suburban sprawl and maintaining open spaces, farmland, and rural character. There was strong support for maintaining low-density housing and minimizing light and noise pollution in rural areas, with clear desire to keep rural areas rural.

Environmental Protection and Rural Character

Core Community Values

Environmental protection and rural preservation emerged as core values in the community's vision for 2050. When asked what they value about St. Mary's County and what aspects of rural character are most important to protect, participants emphasized preserving rural character, open spaces, and farmland; protecting waterways, shorelines, and the Chesapeake Bay from pollution; and maintaining and expanding public access to water and shore areas. Community members also emphasized the

importance of keeping farmland and natural landscapes that are part of the heritage and unique tourist appeal of the county.

Agricultural Support

Agriculture was recognized as fundamental to the county's identity and economy. Participants strongly supported retaining and expanding support for agriculture including all aspects of the farming industries such as Amish and Mennonite farms, oyster farming and watermen, small organic farms, and traditional/conventional agriculture.

Climate Resilience

The community highlighted the importance of climate resilience strategies, including shoreline preservation and protection of wetlands, smart growth policies to limit development in flood-prone areas, and calls for solar panel installations on public buildings and parking lots as part of the county's sustainability efforts.

Redevelopment and Infrastructure

Support for Revitalization

Several areas of the county, particularly Lexington Park, have aging commercial development and housing stock that would benefit from reinvestment. These established communities contain existing infrastructure investments that could support redevelopment more efficiently than extending services to undeveloped areas. Community members voiced

strong support for redevelopment in areas like Lexington Park, with emphasis on improving the quality of the housing stock and commercial development. They also support the concept of redeveloping and replacing aging commercial centers with moderately dense housing and mixing residential uses with commercial and office uses. This redevelopment focus reflects both a desire to revitalize established communities and a recognition that making better use of existing infrastructure is preferable to expanding development into new areas.

Openness to Revitalization and Intensification in Strategic Areas

The community demonstrated openness to redevelopment and intensification in appropriate locations. When asked about redeveloping aging commercial areas with the understanding that financial feasibility may require more intensive development than originally existed, 81% of respondents were supportive or potentially supportive of strategic redevelopment, recognizing that revitalizing aging areas may require some increased intensity.

Development Quality and Context

The community vision emphasized mixed-use developments, walkable communities, and support for local businesses and entrepreneurs as alternatives to sprawl and big-box development. Participants called for focusing on redevelopment and reuse of existing structures when possible,

especially in older areas of the county, and encouraging mixed-use developments with walkable community design.

Housing Diversity and Attainability

Need for Diverse Housing Options

The community clearly articulated the need for increased housing options to support residents at all income levels. Participants called for workforce housing, alternative housing types, and addressing homelessness and housing insecurity through increased county support.

Location Preferences for Different Housing Types

Community participants indicated their support for diverse housing types in established communities like Lexington Park, California, Hollywood, Mechanicsville, and Charlotte Hall, with more mixed support for Leonardtown. Depending on the planning area,

residents supported the idea of adding diverse housing types, such as multi-story mixed-use buildings (with retail or offices on the ground floor and housing or offices on upper floors), starter homes and townhomes, and multifamily housing (apartments or condominiums) to the county's housing inventory. The strongest support was for new, smaller starter homes and townhouses. These housing choices can increase the attainability for younger workers and families, aging seniors, and critical public service employees to live and work in St. Mary's County.

Access to Green Spaces

Community participants called for maintaining and expanding access to green spaces, parks, and trails. There was emphasis on encouraging mixed-use developments with integrated green spaces as part of the overall development pattern.

Planning Areas Framework

Background

Following an assessment of the Planning Areas, the designations follow the same framework as outlined in the 2010 Plan. Growth areas are intended to receive a majority of residential, commercial and industrial development, and are served or proposed to be served with public water and sewer (with some exceptions) and other infrastructure to meet the needs of current and future residents. These planning areas are divided into three categories – Development Districts, Town Centers, and Village Centers (see Figure 1: Planning Areas Map).

These Growth Areas are designated as receiving areas for Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs). The Rural areas support agricultural and working lands and waters operations, and the Protected areas support protection of the County's important natural assets.

Relationship to Countywide Planning

The Planning Areas Framework guides capital investment decisions, infrastructure planning, zoning decisions, and development review processes throughout the county. This framework directs priorities based on designated growth areas and the Land Use Map (LUM), creating focused opportunities for

targeted policies and implementation strategies for each planning area type.

Development Districts

The primary growth centers are concentrated in Development Districts, which are urban in pattern and form; designated for intensive residential, commercial, and industrial development; and are the priority locations for community facilities, services, and amenities. There are two Development Districts: **Lexington Park** and **Leonardtown**. The County has an adopted [Lexington Park Development District \(LPDD\) Master Plan](#) that provides the land use guidance within that area along with the [Innovation District Master Plan](#) that applies to the [Aeropark Innovation District](#), a subarea of the LPDD. Large portions of the Leonardtown Development District are currently included in the Town of Leonardtown's future municipal growth area as designated in the [Leonardtown Comprehensive Plan \(2025\)](#). See Appendix B: Development Capacity Analysis for more information on development capacity in the Leonardtown Development District.

Development Districts are designated as receiving areas for Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs) and are planned to support medium and high-density residential development with

densities greater than 5 units per acre. The plan delineates and encourages development of a central core with mixed uses surrounded by larger inter-mixed blocks of residential, commercial, and industrial uses. This promotes creative and carefully designed commercial areas, avoiding the inefficiencies and negative visual impacts of strip commercial development.

Infrastructure provision is prioritized in Development Districts to support urban development patterns and design. Visual and functional qualities of development are maintained through adherence to site standards for landscaping, architectural design, access, lot coverage and open space, and buffering from adjacent developments and transportation corridors.

Town Centers

Town Centers are secondary growth centers that are urban in pattern and form; designated for moderately intense residential, commercial, and industrial development; and are supported by the provision of community facilities and services. These areas are **Charlotte Hall, Hollywood, Mechanicsville, New Market, and Piney Point**.

Town Centers are designated as receiving areas for Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs) and should be provided with infrastructure that supports densities of up to 5 units per acre. Mixed use development is encouraged in these

areas, and master plans should be generated for each of the town centers to ensure that visual and functional qualities of development adhere to standards for landscaping, architectural design, on-site and off-site advertising, access, lot coverage and open space, and buffering from adjacent developments and transportation corridors.

Development in Town Centers should discourage strip development and restrict direct access onto major transportation corridors. If master plans are prepared for individual town centers, the service areas of public facilities should be mapped to assist in establishing growth patterns and identifying infrastructure needs.

Village Centers

After Development Districts and Town Centers, the third and final type of growth centers are Village Centers, which are intended to serve as the focus for rural community facilities, services, and activities. These areas are **Callaway, Chaptico, Clements, Loveville, Ridge, St. Inigoes, and Valley Lee**.

Village Centers should be provided with infrastructure that supports densities of up to 5 dwelling units per acre. Traditional village development patterns and design should be fostered, with master plans prepared for each Village Center.

Compact development patterns should be encouraged by clustering septic easements to create open space. Infill development and redevelopment should

provide pedestrian connections to adjacent properties. Village Centers should promote use of development rights transferred from rural preservation districts and encourage expansion of rural services within these designated areas.

Relationship to County-Wide Planning

The Planning Areas Framework guides capital investment decisions, infrastructure planning, zoning decisions,

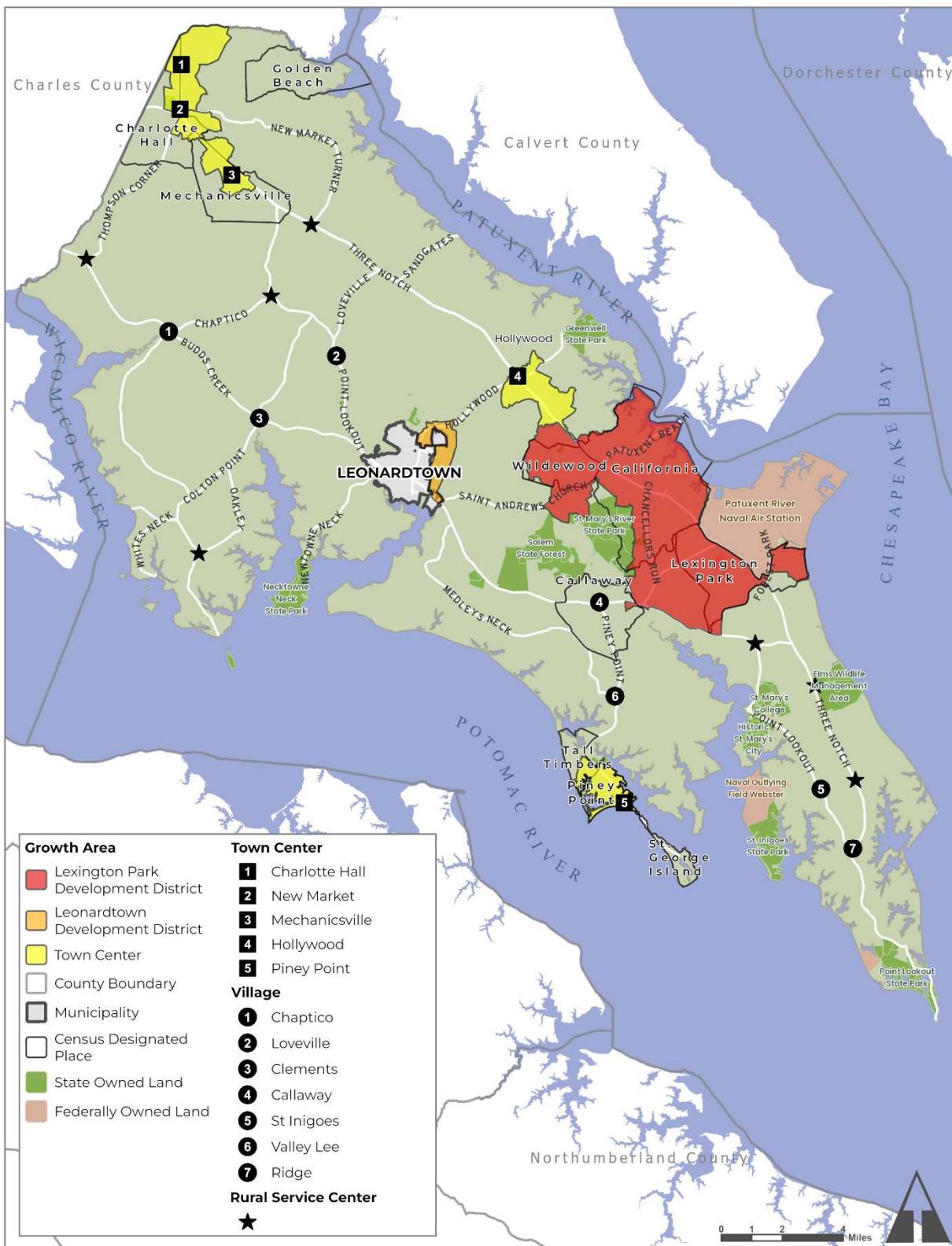
and development review procedures throughout the county. This framework directs priorities based on designated Growth Areas and the Land Use Map (LUM), creating focused opportunities for targeted policies and implementation strategies for each planning area type.

Planning Areas Map

The Planning Areas Map (Figure 1) identifies the locations of the Development Districts, Town Centers, and Village Centers.

Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

Figure 1: Planning Areas Map



Land Use Map

Understanding the Land Use Map

The 2010 Plan envisioned a holistic approach to land use planning through the adoption of the 2030 Land Use Concept Plan (and its 22 Land Use Categories) as amended by Ordinance 2018-12 for the Lexington Park Development District Master Plan.

The St. Mary's 2050 Plan includes an updated Land Use Map (see Figure 2: Land Use Map) and a consolidated list of Land Use Categories (see Table 2 : Summary of Land Use Category Changes).

How to Use the Land Use Map

The Land Use Map and categories, combined with the Policies and Actions in this plan, guide coordinated and sustainable land use decisions in St. Mary's County. The Land Use Map also informs decisions relating to preservation of natural and rural areas, future economic development opportunities, infrastructure investment, and zoning.

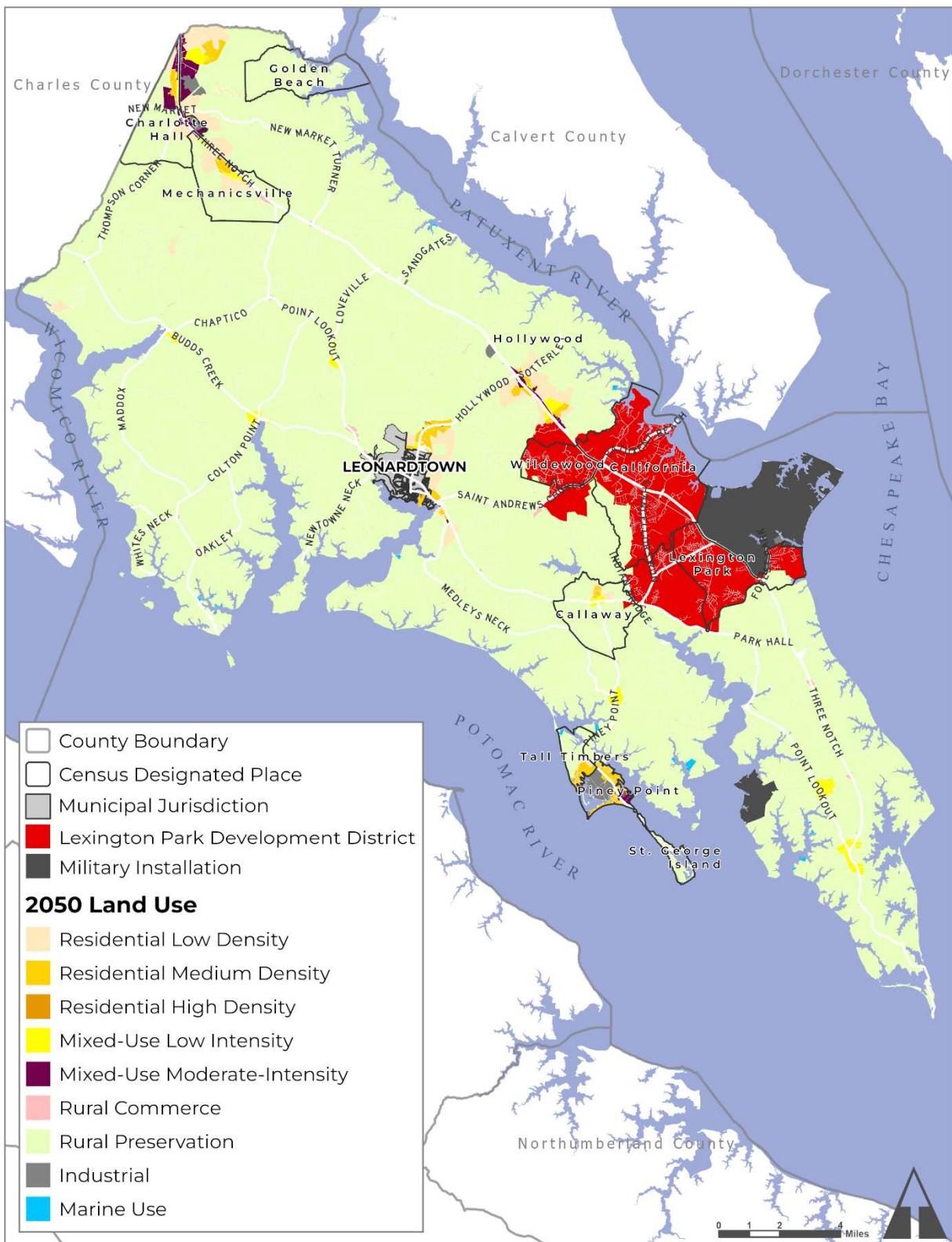
Upon the adoption of the St. Mary's 2050 plan, the *Official Zoning Maps* (as adopted by Ordinance No. Z-10-02) may need to be updated to reflect changes in policy and vision.

The Land Use Map provides broad policy guidance, while the *Official Zoning Maps* and *Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance* provide specific rules and development requirements to achieve the vision established by this plan.

Table 2 : Summary of Land Use Category Changes

2010 Plan	St. Mary's 2050 Plan
Residential Low Density Transitional	Residential Low Density
Residential Low Density	Residential Medium Density
Residential Medium Density	Residential High Density
Residential High Density	Mixed-Uses Low Intensity
Mixed-Uses Low Intensity	Residential Mixed-Use
Residential Mixed-Use	Mixed-Use Moderate-Intensity
Mixed-Use Moderate-Intensity	Mixed Use Medium Intensity
Mixed Use Medium Intensity	Rural Commerce
Rural Commerce	Crossroads Commercial
Crossroads Commercial	Rural Preservation
Rural Preservation	Rural Residential
Rural Residential	Industrial
Industrial	Marine Use
Marine Use	Publicly-Used Lands
Publicly-Used Lands	Deleted
Protected Open Space	Deleted
Military Installation	Deleted
Municipal Jurisdiction	Deleted
Corridor Mixed-Use	Removed as part of LPDDMP
Community Commercial	Removed as part of LPDDMP
Downtown Mixed-Use	Removed as part of LPDDMP
Employment Center	Removed as part of LPDDMP
Transportation	Deleted

Figure 2: Land Use Map



2050 Land Use Categories

Each Land Use Category is described in detail on the following pages. Each category includes a general description of the land use, primary uses, secondary uses, infrastructure, applicable zoning districts, residential density, and jurisdictional collaboration. The purpose is to illustrate the desired development type and features within each Land Use Category.

The following are key terms used to describe the Land Use Category characteristics:

- **General Description of Land Use:** A high-level description of the type of development appropriate in the Land Use Category.
- **Primary Uses:** The dominant land uses in that Land Use Category that inform the character of the area.
- **Secondary Uses:** The supporting and complementary land uses that are compatible with the primary uses but are not the primary focus of the area.
- **Infrastructure to Serve Development:** The form of water, wastewater, and road ownership types appropriate for the Land Use Category.
- **Applicable Zoning Districts:** The Zoning Districts in the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance that are appropriate in the Land Use Category.
- **General Residential Density:** On average, the number of housing units per acre that are envisioned for the Land Use Category.
- **Jurisdictional Collaboration:** Other jurisdictions whose collaboration may be warranted for development in the Land Use Category.

Residential Low Density

General Description of Land Use

Low density residential development. A strong focus is on maintenance of preserved open space and sensitive areas through clustering of lots and protected natural areas.

Primary Land Uses

- Single-family residential
- Multi-family residential

Secondary Land Uses

- Neighborhood scale civic/public uses

Infrastructure to Serve Development

- Public water and/or sewer
- Private well and/or septic
- Public and private roads

Applicable Zoning

- Residential, Low-Density – Transitional (RL-T)
- Residential, Low-Density (RL)
- Residential Neighborhood Conservation District (RNC)

General Residential Density

- 1–5 dwelling units per acre (with TDRs)

Jurisdictional Collaboration

- Coordination with Naval Air Station Patuxent River for areas near military installation

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Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

Residential Medium Density

General Description of Land Use

Medium density residential development and accessory services that support clustered development, with a focus on preservation of open space.

Primary Land Uses

- Single- family residential
- Multi-family residential

Secondary Land Uses

- Neighborhood scale civic/public uses

Infrastructure to Serve Development

- Public water and/or sewer
- Public and private roads

Applicable Zoning

- Residential, Medium Density District

General Residential Density

- 1–10 dwelling units per acre (with TDRs)

Jurisdictional Collaboration

- Coordination with Naval Air Station Patuxent River for areas near military installation

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Residential High Density

General Description of Land Use

High density residential development and accessory services that support clustered development.

Primary Land Uses

- Multifamily residential

Secondary Land Uses

- Civic/public uses

Infrastructure to Serve Development

- Public water and/or sewer
- Public and private roads

Applicable Zoning

- Residential, High-Density District (RH)

General Residential Density

- 10–20 dwelling units per acre (with TDRs)

Jurisdictional Collaboration

- Coordination with Naval Air Station Patuxent River for areas near military installation

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Mixed-Use Low Intensity

General Description of Land Use

Neighborhood-scale development with primarily residential uses and limited compatible commercial and residential uses along auto corridors.

Primary Land Uses

- Commercial
 - Office
 - Retail
 - Restaurant

Secondary Land Uses

- Civic/public uses

Infrastructure to Serve Development

- Public water and/or sewer
- Private well and/or septic
- Public and private roads

Applicable Zoning

- Village Center Mixed Use District (VMX)
- Residential Mixed Use District (RMX)

General Residential Density

- 1–5 dwelling units per acre (with TDRs)

Jurisdictional Collaboration

- Coordination with Naval Air Station Patuxent River for areas near military installation

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Mixed-Use Moderate Intensity

General Description of Land Use

Moderate-density/intensity developments blending residential, office, and retail uses in urban-suburban transition areas, designed to balance auto and pedestrian access.

Primary Land Uses

- Commercial
 - Office
 - Retail
 - Restaurant

Secondary Land Uses

- Office
- Civic/public uses

Infrastructure to Serve Development

- Public water and/or sewer
- Private well and/or septic
- Public and private roads

Applicable Zoning

- Town Center Mixed Use District (TMX)
- Corridor Mixed Use District (CMX)

General Residential Density

- 5–15 dwelling units per acre (with TDRs)

Jurisdictional Collaboration

Coordination with Naval Air Station Patuxent River for areas near military installation

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Rural Commerce

General Description of Land Use

Small-scale commercial development located at rural crossroads nodes that serves rural communities. These areas maintain low-intensity developments and rural community character and prohibit strip development.

Primary Land Uses

- Commercial (office, retail, restaurant)

Secondary Land Uses

- Residential

Infrastructure to Serve Development

- Private well (possibly public water if included in service area)
- Private septic system (possibly public sewer if included in service area)
- Public and private roads

Applicable Zoning

- Rural Service Center (RSC)
- Rural Commercial Limited (RCL)

General Residential Density

- Residential density shall not extend one dwelling unit detached

Jurisdictional Collaboration

- Coordination with Leonardtown for areas near municipal limits

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Rural Preservation

General Description of Land Use

Area designated for preservation in support of the land and water resource base necessary for the maintenance of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.

Primary Land Uses

- Farmlands
- Forests
- Fisheries
- Very low-density residential

Secondary Land Uses

- Agritourism

Infrastructure to Serve Development

- Private well and septic system
- Public and private roads

Applicable Zoning

- Rural Preservation District (RPD)
- Residential Neighborhood Conservation District (RNC)

General Residential Density

- 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres on average

Jurisdictional Collaboration

- Coordination with Leonardtown for areas near municipal limits
- Coordination with Naval Air Station Patuxent River for areas near military installation

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Industrial

General Description of Land Use

Designated for manufacturing, warehousing, and technology industry with a focus on the preservation of sensitive areas.

Primary Land Uses

- Manufacturing/processing facilities
- Research & development centers
- Warehousing/distribution
- Airport facilities

Secondary Land Uses

- Office

Infrastructure to Serve Development

- Public water and/or sewer
- Private well and/or septic
- Public and private roads

Applicable Zoning

- Industrial (I)

General Residential Density

- Not applicable

Jurisdictional Collaboration

- Coordination with Naval Air Station Patuxent River for areas near military installation

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Marine Use

General Description of Land Use

Water-dependent commercial activities that protect shoreline resources while supporting fisheries, aquaculture, marine-commerce, and public access.

Primary Land Uses

- Marine-related commercial
- Office
- Tourist-related facilities

Secondary Land Uses

- Residential
- Tourist-related facilities

Infrastructure to Serve Development

- Public water and/or sewer
- Private well and/or septic
- Public and private roads

Applicable Zoning

- Commercial Marine (CM)

General Residential Density

- One single-family dwelling is permitted per site

Jurisdictional Collaboration

- Coordination with Naval Air Station Patuxent River for areas near military installation

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Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

To achieve intentional managed growth in St. Mary's County, the following goals and policies should be used to guide decision-making on future development initiatives. The corresponding actions identify specific implementation strategies to further accomplish the growth management goals.

GOAL 1: UTILIZE THE LAND USE MAP AND GROWTH AREAS TO GUIDE DEVELOPMENT

Use the Planning Areas and Land Use Map for land development and capital investment decision making to prevent sprawl and protect the County's agricultural and natural resources.

Policy 1.1: Guide New Development to Growth Areas

Guide growth in the county to Growth Areas (Development Districts, Town Centers, and Village Centers).

Policy 1.2: Concentrate Development Activity in Areas Served by Public Water and Sewer

Concentrate development activity in areas served or proposed to be served with public water and sewer, primarily the Development Districts and secondarily in the Town Centers.

Action 1.2.1: Evaluate the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO)

Assess the CZO and identify any needed updates to the zoning districts, development standards, and permitted uses to better

implement the goals and policies of this plan, and particularly the Land Use Map and associated categories. Consider changes to better support the development of new smaller starter homes and townhouses.

Policy 1.3: Protect Naval Flight Operations through Land Use Planning

Protect the air operations of the Naval Air Station Patuxent River (NAS Pax) by using AICUZ (air installation compatible use zone) to guide land use and development intensity decisions.

Action 1.3.1: Coordinate with NAS Pax on Development of New Compatible Use Study (CUS)

Coordinate with NAS Pax on development of a new Compatible Use Study to develop recommendations for future land use maps and development regulations.

GOAL 2: CONCENTRATE THE MAJORITY OF GROWTH IN DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

Most of the growth in St. Mary's County should be concentrated in the development districts outlined in the Planning Areas Framework to maximize existing infrastructure, promote sustainable communities, and preserve rural areas.

Policy 2.1: Support Implementation of the Lexington Park Development District Master Plan

The County will support the implementation of the Lexington Park Development District Master Plan through the development review process and implementation of master plan strategies.

Action 2.1.1: Update Planning for Lexington Park Development District

Update planning for Three Notch Road and FDR Boulevard expansion in the Lexington Park development district as needed.

Policy 2.2: Consider the Town of Leonardtown's Plans for Municipal Growth Areas

When making land use decisions on lands within the Leonardtown Development District, the County will consider the Town of Leonardtown's plans for municipal Growth Areas within the County's planning and zoning jurisdiction. Figure 3 shows Leonardtown's Municipal Growth Areas.

Policy 2.3: Concentrate Commercial Uses in Development Districts

Concentrate commercial uses primarily in the County's development districts, and secondarily in the town and village centers.

Policy 2.4: Locate Industrial and Office Uses in Development Districts

Locate industrial and office uses in and near the development district areas, near the airport and in the town centers as defined by the Land Use Map.

Policy 2.5: Promote Building Well Connected Roadway Networks for Planned Growth in Development Districts

Promote building well connected local roadway networks to support planned growth in the Development Districts so as to help to preserve state highway capacity mainly for regional and through traffic.

Policy 2.6: Provide Infrastructure that Supports Medium and High Density Residential Use

Provide infrastructure that supports medium and high density residential use in development districts.

Policy 2.7: Foster Urban Design and Development for Each Development District

Foster urban development patterns and design.

Policy 2.8: Delineate and Encourage Development of a Central Area with Mixed Uses

To create a sense of place, delineate and encourage development of a central area with mixed uses surrounded by larger inter-mixed blocks of residential, commercial, industrial, and business uses.

Policy 2.9: Maintain Visual and Functional Qualities of Development through Adherence to Site Standards

Maintain visual and functional qualities of development through adherence to site standards for landscaping, architectural design, access, lot coverage and open space, and buffering from adjacent developments and transportation corridors.

Policy 2.10: Allow for and Provide Adequate Buffers Between Different Land Use Types

Allow for and provide adequate buffers to avoid conflicts between different land use types and to provide visual screening.

Policy 2.11: Promote the Use of Development Rights Transferred from Rural Districts

Promote use of development rights transferred from Rural Preservation (RPD) zoning districts.

Action 2.11.1: Promote Transfer of Development Rights to Potential Developers

County Land Use and Growth Management staff should prepare materials to promote the use of Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs) for new projects proposed within development districts, particularly for projects that include attainable housing and walkable, mixed-use developments.

Policy 2.12: Minimize Outlets to Major Roads

Minimize the number of outlets to major roads to increase efficiency of flow of traffic and to promote public safety by reducing the number of intersection conflict points.

Policy 2.13: Implement Specific Highway Access Policies

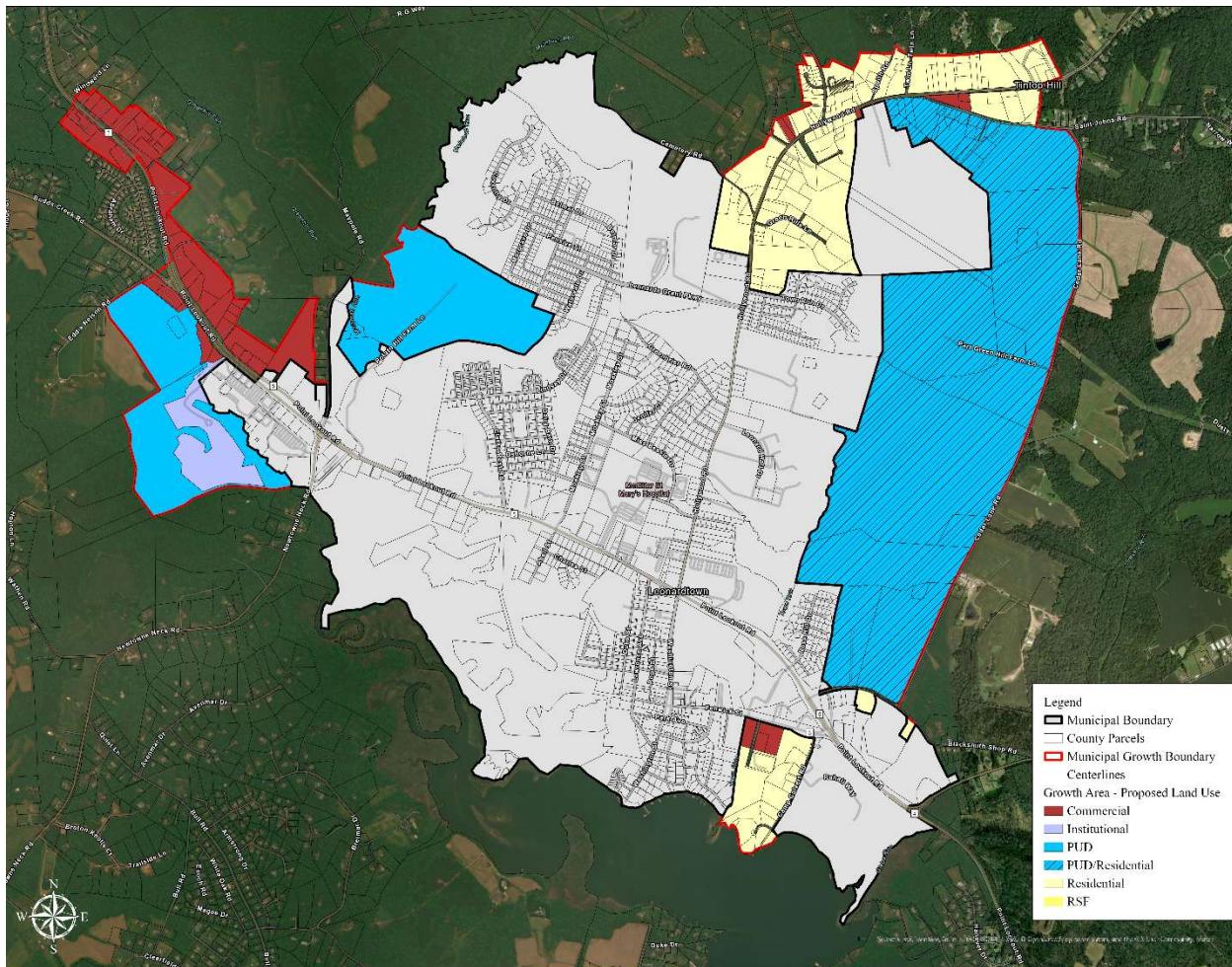
Implement highway access management plans for St. Andrew's Church Road (MD 4), Point Lookout Road (MD 5), Three Notch Road (MD 5/235), and Budd's Creek Road (MD 234).

Policy 2.14: Encourage Creative and Carefully Designed Commercial Areas

Encourage creative and carefully designed commercial areas, avoiding the

inefficiencies and negative visual, land use and traffic impacts of strip commercial development.

Figure 3: Leonardtown Municipal Growth Areas and Proposed Land Uses



GOAL 3: SUPPORT COMPACT TOWN CENTERS

Support walkable, mixed-use, compact town centers as an alternative to big-box-style development.

Policy 3.1: Provide Infrastructure that Supports Specific Densities

Provide infrastructure that supports densities of 5 units per acre.

Policy 3.2: Encourage Mixed-Use Development

Encourage mixed use development and discourage strip development.

Action 3.2.1: Prepare Master Plans for Each Town Center

Prepare master plans for each town center to foster town development patterns and design. Consider mechanisms to reduce the potential for “repeat” land uses that are trending in new developments, including gas stations and convenience retail uses.

Policy 3.3: Minimize Points of Direct Access to Major Highways

Work with Maryland Department of Transportation to minimize points of direct access to major highways and utilize access management best practices that consolidate driveway access are within a common development.

Action 3.3.1: Implement Highway Access Policies for Three Notch Road

Work with state to implement highway access policies for Three Notch Road (MD 5/235) within town centers and village centers, and provide for sufficient streets to minimize local traffic on Three Notch Road.



Policy 3.4: Promote Use of Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs)

Promote use of Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs) from Rural Preservation zoning district to boost density of residences or intensity of businesses in town centers.

Policy 3.5: Encourage Installation of Underground Services

Encourage installation of underground services to minimize visual impacts of overhead utility lines.

Policy 3.6: Facilitate Improvement of Walkability and Bikeability

Facilitate the improvement of walkability and bikeability in already developed areas to encourage more active travel in the county and reduce vehicle miles traveled.

Action 3.6.1: Add Sidewalks and Multimodal Trails

Add sidewalks and bike/pedestrian trails by collaborating with private landowners, utilizing County-owned land, investing County funds, and updating the zoning ordinance.

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GOAL 4: ENCOURAGE RURAL SERVICES AND MODERATE RESIDENTIAL GROWTH IN VILLAGE CENTERS

Encourage location and expansion of rural services and moderate residential growth in village centers: Callaway, Chaptico, Clements, Loveville, Ridge, Valley Lee, and St. Inigoes.

Policy 4.1: Support Development of Rural Village Centers to Serve Surrounding Rural Communities.

Support development projects in rural village centers that align with the scale, character, and uses identified for these areas.

Action 4.1.1: Prepare Master Plans for Each Village Center

Prepare master plans for each village center to foster village development patterns and design.

Policy 4.2: Limit Moderate and High-Density Housing in Rural Areas

Limit large subdivisions and high-density housing in rural areas.

Policy 4.3: Encourage Low-Intensity Mixed Use Development in Village Centers

Encourage low-intensity mixed use development in Village Centers, and discourage strip development.

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GOAL 5: SUPPORT INFILL DEVELOPMENT AND ADAPTIVE REDEVELOPMENT

Support infill, redevelopment, and adaptive reuse of existing structures, when possible.

Policy 5.1: Update the County's Zoning Ordinance

Explore updating the County's zoning ordinance to better support adaptive reuse and the redevelopment of aging commercial areas to better utilize existing infrastructure and support economic development and attainable housing needs.

Policy 5.2: Encourage Infill Development through Designated Growth Area Incentives

Encourage infill development rather than new subdivision and development of large undeveloped parcels through incentives applied to projects in the designated Growth Areas, with

coordination with NAS Pax, where appropriate.

Policy 5.3: Discourage Scattered New Development

Discourage scattered or "leapfrog" development through the use of disincentives (e.g., lower FAR and density allowances).

Policy 5.4: Encourage Development on Existing Platted Lots

Encourage development on existing platted lots within neighborhood conservation areas consistent with current patterns of development (bulk, density, and design) and with enhanced resource protection. Prohibit outward expansion of neighborhood conservation areas.

GOAL 6: MAINTAIN LAND BASE NEEDED FOR AGRICULTURAL AND WORKING LANDS INDUSTRIES

Maintain lands within the Rural planning area and Rural Preservation land use category to support agricultural, equestrian, and other working lands industries. (See Environment and Natural Resources Element for more information on agriculture and working lands preservation. See the Economic Development Element for more information on agriculture and working lands business support.)

GOAL 7: MEET THE COUNTY'S WATER SUPPLY NEEDS

Meet the County's long-term water supply needs and ensure that the supply is safe and efficiently provided within defined service areas. (See Public Facilities and Infrastructure Investments Element for more information on this goal.)

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GOAL 8: DEVELOP INFRASTRUCTURE TO SERVE WATER AND SEWER NEEDS IN GROWTH AREAS

Provide infrastructure to meet water and sewer service needs in Growth Areas, ensuring adequate capacity to accommodate future development, and address adequate facilities and services outside Growth Areas. (See Public Facilities and Infrastructure Investments Element for more information on this goal.)

Policy 8.1: Invest in Infrastructure Improvements While Limiting Sprawl

Invest in water and sewer infrastructure improvements without incentivizing sprawl or 'urbanizing' rural parts of the county.

Action 8.1.1: Partner with MetCom to Secure Funding for Priority Service Areas

The County will work with MetCom to secure needed funding to support extension of utility lines to priority service areas, particularly

within the Lexington Park Development District. These areas should be identified as priorities for economic development and attainable housing potential. Potential funding sources include special taxing districts, general obligation bonds, and other potential funding sources.

Action 8.1.2: Explore Ability to Expand Infrastructure or Establish Private Wastewater Systems in Growth Areas

In partnership with MetCom, evaluate opportunities to provide private wastewater systems within Growth Areas that are outside of planned service areas.

GOAL 9: SUPPORT COLLABORATION WITH HEALTH DEPARTMENT AND METCOM TO ADDRESS PROBLEM SEWER AREAS OUTSIDE OF PLANNED SERVICE AREAS

The County Health Department will work with MetCom to address problem sewer (septic) areas as identified in the Comprehensive Water and Sewerage Plan (CWSP) in a way that balances community needs and priorities while protecting the environment.

Action 9.1.1: Evaluate Land Acquisition Opportunities for Potential Wastewater Systems

Identify land acquisition opportunities for the use of a wastewater system to address the problem sewer areas as identified in the CWSP.

Action 9.1.2: Explore Funding Options for Addressing Problem Sewer Areas

Research and secure potential funding opportunities through State/Federal grants along with any other funding source available to help offset the cost for evaluation, design and construction of a wastewater system.

Action 9.1.3: Explore Sewage Disposal Options for Addressing Problem Sewer Areas

Evaluate and determine sewage disposal options on land acquired to address problem sewer areas.

3

Housing Element

In This Section

Planning for Housing
Goals, Policies, and Actions



Planning for Housing

National Trends

The United States has experienced a significant housing shortage since the early 2010s that was precipitated by the lead up to and occurrence of the Great Recession of 2008 and has continued for nearly two decades, [according to the Congressional Research Service](#). There are numerous reasons for this extended housing shortage that vary depending on local housing market dynamics. The inadequate housing supply can be explained generally by these factors:

- Housing starts (new housing construction) have been behind by millions of units due to the **slow recovery of the recession**, resulting in the overall housing supply not keeping pace with the formation of new households
- **Increasing costs of land and construction** have slowed residential development and driven prices up
- **A limited supply of land for new housing development** in many communities hinders production of housing
- **Institutional investors** have bought up starter homes, including “flipping” homebuyers, limiting units available in the for-sale market or driving up for-sale costs
- **“Aging in place”** is restricting normal filtering of housing from one

household to another, reducing the stock of housing that is normally available to first-time homebuyers

- Increases in **seasonally vacant housing** that are used as short-term rentals or second homes is reducing the year-round inventory of housing
- Approval of new housing units is often challenged by **residents that are not supportive of these development projects**

Across the nation, the demand for housing is also changing. [The Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University identified](#) in 2018 that the fastest growing household types are younger families with children, older persons, and empty-nesters. Many households within these sectors have constrained incomes that limit their ability to afford higher priced housing that is currently available. These dynamics are affecting both households looking to purchase a home and renters. Many of these households are also seeking different housing options that reduce management and upkeep of homes and yards and provide walkable neighborhoods with easy access to amenities such as parks, community centers, neighborhood shops, and walking trails.

Regional Trends

These dynamics are playing out in Maryland. [The Office of the Comptroller reported in 2025](#) that the state had a shortage of 100,000 units and needed to build 590,000 new homes to meet projected demand through 2045. This housing shortage has resulted in a decrease in normal population growth from migration, including a shift of younger and lower- and middle-income residents leaving the state for more affordable areas. This reduces the workforce of the state, limits economic development potential, and constrains government revenues needed to provide increasing costs to provide public services.

Data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey indicate that these trends are also occurring in St. Mary's County:

- While St. Mary's County has a higher median household income than the state (\$114,580 in St. Mary's County and \$101,652 in Maryland), **the proportion of different income levels in the County is diverse** (11% of households earned between \$100k-124k, 13% earned between \$75k-99k, 12% earned between \$50k-74k, 10%

earned between \$25k-49k, and 9% earned less than \$25k in 2023).

- Between 2013 and 2023, the County experienced a **3% reduction in the proportion of family households**.
- During the same timeframe, the **median home value increased 7.1% on top of inflation**, rising from \$290,400 in 2013 (\$377,275 in 2023 inflation-adjusted dollars) to \$403,900 in 2023.
- There was also a **46% decline in the number of homes available under \$300,000 between 2013 and 2023** (not adjusted for inflation) – a price point that is generally affordable to middle-income households and critical public workers, such as teachers, nurses, and police officers
- **29% of homeowners were “cost-burdened”** (spent more than 30% of their income on household costs) in 2023.
- **45% of renters were “cost-burdened”** during 2023.

Similar to the state, these trends affect the county's ability to grow economically as many workers cannot afford to purchase or rent a home locally and may choose to work elsewhere where homes are more affordable.

Attainable Housing Approach

Local governments play a key role in determining housing production as land use is planned and regulated at the local level. Often, policies and regulations that are intended to support one community objective end up creating challenges to housing development. [In Maryland, the Comptroller identified](#) the following barriers to housing production statewide:

- Density limitations
- Parking requirements
- Public facility ordinances
- Forest conservation obligations
- Infrastructure limitations
- Development impact fees and building excise taxes
- Public input periods that delay project approvals and increase costs
- Appeals rights
- Process inefficiencies and administrative burden (both for government and developers)

Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

Many communities, across the nation and in Maryland, are now focused on providing housing that is attainable to a variety of households and are utilizing numerous tools to address the challenging problem. The following provides a summary of types of tools used by communities across the nation. All of these tools are not necessarily supported by this plan.

- Protecting naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) from increasing in cost
- Updating zoning densities in certain locations to increase the potential for a variety of home types, including “missing middle” or “gentle density” housing types such as pocket neighborhoods, cottage courts, duplexes, triplexes, and other smaller multi-unit developments
- Reducing parking, landscaping, and open space requirements for single-family attached and multifamily housing to help offset construction costs

- Entering into public-private partnerships with developers to ensure that housing constructed will be supportive of local objectives
- Recruiting new housing developers to the area to encourage competition and produce new housing types not being met by local developers
- Providing free, permitted by-right site plans for missing middle housing types to promote production of these units locally
- Incentivizing or requiring construction of units affordable to certain households (typically identified by % of area median income) as part of new residential or mixed-use developments
- Raising local public dollars for a housing trust fund to support housing efforts
- Establishing a local or regional housing land trust to manage deed restricted, affordable housing units

These approaches were considered as part of the St. Mary's 2050 planning project.

Key Findings from Public Engagement

The housing policies and actions in this chapter were developed in consideration of the previously mentioned housing factors and as guided by community engagement.

Several important key takeaways emerged from this participation process and an analysis of current conditions in St. Mary's County, which are described in more detail below. Overall, residents recognize that the existing housing framework must adapt to evolving needs and growth challenges, while maintaining the rural character of the county and ensuring adequate provision of services to all households and businesses. Providing attainable housing options that align with community character and do not exceed local infrastructure capacity is the primary housing challenge for the County today.

Need for Diverse Housing Options

The community articulated the need for increased housing options to support residents at all income levels.

Participants called for workforce housing, alternative housing types, and addressing homelessness and housing insecurity through increased County support. There was strong support for housing attainability for critical workers (fire, police, nurses, teachers), young families, and young professionals as they are essential to the county's future.

Strong Support for Smaller Homes and Townhouses

When asked about providing smaller homes and townhouses in Growth Areas to ensure housing availability for key community members, the majority of respondents expressed support. This topic represents one of the strongest areas of consensus in the housing discussion.

Role of Multifamily Housing

Community opinion on multifamily housing (apartments and condominiums) is more divided. Survey responses showed an almost three-way split between support, opposition, and neutral stances on the topic of multifamily housing. Despite the variation in response, there was recognition that multifamily housing can play a role in increasing attainability for younger workers, aging seniors, and critical workers.

Location Preference for Housing Types

Survey responses indicated strong support for diverse housing types in established communities like Lexington Park, California, Hollywood, Leonardtown Development District, and Charlotte Hall. Depending on the Planning Area, residents support the idea of adding diverse housing types such as multi-story mixed-use buildings, starter homes and townhomes, and multifamily housing. Following national trends, many residents

are interested in housing options that provide walkable and bikeable access to shopping, recreation, and dining uses that foster neighborhood vitality and community interaction.

Support for Strategic Redevelopment

The community demonstrated openness to redevelopment and intensification in

appropriate locations. When asked about redeveloping aging commercial areas with the understanding that financial feasibility may require more intensive development than originally existed, an overwhelming majority of respondents were supportive. Respondents recognized revitalizing aging areas could convert to increased intensity centers that include housing and mixed-use development.

Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

The following goals and policies should guide decision-making and investments for housing in St. Mary's County. The corresponding actions identify specific implementation strategies to further accomplish the housing goals.

GOAL 1: SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN, ATTAINABLE HOUSING CHOICES

Through the policies included in this plan, including the Land Use Map (LUM), support development of housing options that provide a variety of price points, styles of housing, and types of neighborhoods to meet the diverse needs of the County's current and future residents. This should include a special focus on housing for seniors and supporting workforce and missing middle housing options.

Policy 1.1: Support the Development of Workforce and Missing Middle Housing

Support the development of workforce housing and missing middle housing. Housing types that can support this goal include, but are not limited to:

- Small-lot single-family homes such as pocket neighborhoods and cottage courts
- Duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes
- Townhomes
- Small-unit (5-12), multi-family developments

Action 1.1.1: Consider Development of an Attainable Housing Work Group

Consider the establishment of an Attainable Housing Work Group to oversee development of the housing study (referenced in Housing Action 1.1.1: Prepare a Housing Study to Determine the Optimum Mix of Housing Types for Existing and Future Needs) and to

evaluate additional tools and programs that the County could undertake to address the housing challenge. Include developers and builders that work in the county, and relevant community members in this work group.

Action 1.1.2: Prepare a Housing Study to Determine the Optimum Mix of Housing Types for Existing and Future Needs

In partnership with Leonardtown, the Departments of Economic Development (DED) and Land Use and Growth Management (LUGM) will develop a local housing study to determine the optimum mix of housing types or range of costs to support the County's existing and future needs based on an evaluation of the demographic and economic characteristics of the population and housing supply factors. It should also include specific strategies to be taken to support attainable housing needs. This study may also be used to refine the percent of area median income (AMI) threshold for affordable housing policies, such as Housing Action 1.1.4: Award Bonus Densities for the

Provision of Workforce and Affordable Housing.

Action 1.1.3: Track Successful Housing Development

Establish a county-tracking mechanism for instances of successful missing middle and workforce housing growth to facilitate future collaboration with residents and development community. Large employers, community associations, and the development community should be the focus of this collaboration.

Action 1.1.4: Award Bonus Densities for the Provision of Workforce and Affordable Housing

Award bonus densities in exchange for the provision of workforce and affordable housing in the Growth Areas. Review the bonus density provisions in the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO) to make the incentive more attractive to developers. Host a roundtable discussion with area housing developers to better ascertain what incentives are needed to produce these types of units. Consider adjusting Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs) requirements in Growth Areas to incentivize development of deed restricted workforce housing units affordable to households earning 110% of area median income or less.

Policy 1.2: Foster the Development of Senior Housing Options

Foster the development of housing options for older adults, including independent living facilities, assisted living accommodations and nursing care facilities.

Action 1.2.1: Evaluate Expedited Review Process for Housing Developments

Evaluate the opportunity to provide an expedited building permit review for housing developments that are affordable to median income households or below.

Action 1.2.2: Streamline Approvals for Aging in Place Home Modifications

Evaluate the building permit requirements for home modifications for seniors and persons with disabilities that are aging in place (staying within their own home). Update processes to streamline these approvals.

Policy 1.3: Ensure Age and Ability Friendliness Through Accessible Designs

Through the adoption of the International Building Code, prioritize accessible design of transportation corridors, sidewalks, and bus stops that are frequently used by older adults. Ensure development regulations and zoning decisions in residential areas, especially aging neighborhoods, allowing older residents to age in place.

Policy 1.4: Continue to Monitor the County's Housing Stock to Ensure Choices for All Income Levels

Continue to monitor the variety of the County's housing stock to ensure choices are provided for all income levels and housing needs.

Action 1.4.1: Adjust Permitting and Incentives to Maintain an Appropriate Balance of Housing Types

Adjust permitting and/or enhance incentives to maintain an appropriate balance of housing types and price points. Bridge the gap between supply and the need for affordable and workforce housing.

Policy 1.5: Encourage the Inclusion of Accessory Dwelling Units and Apartments

Encourage inclusion of accessory dwelling units/apartments where parking is adequate and in accordance with standards that restrict external structural alterations so that the visual character of the neighborhood will be maintained.

Action 1.5.1: Evaluate Need for Equivalent Dwelling Units (EDUs) that Define Water/Sewer Infrastructure Capacity for Accessory Dwelling Units

Evaluate the need to increase equivalent dwelling units (EDUs) for water and sewer service to support development of accessory dwelling units within established and new single-family neighborhoods.

Policy 1.6: Encourage Efficient Design to Reduce Costs and Impacts of Development

Encourage efficient design which reduces the costs and impacts of

development. This includes clustering of homes to reduce land development costs and reducing the per project percentage of land retained for undeveloped open space in the Development District from 50 percent to as low as 20 percent in exchange for the construction of workforce or affordable housing.

Policy 1.7: Permit Manufactured Housing in All Residential Areas

In accordance with [Maryland's Housing Expansion and Affordability Act \(HB538\)](#) adopted in April 2024 and effective as of January 1, 2025, and the CZO, permit manufactured housing, including mobile homes, in zoning districts that allow for single-family residential uses.

Policy 1.8: Provide Quality Housing and Housing Services to Meet Resident Needs

For households that are eligible for County support, provide quality housing and housing services to meet resident needs with respect to accessibility, affordability, location, and diversity of cost.

Action 1.8.1: Consider Surveying Housing Support Users

Consider surveying housing support users to identify the most effective programs and gaps in needed services.

GOAL 2: ENCOURAGE THE MAINTENANCE AND UPKEEP OF EXISTING HOUSING

Enhance the livability of both existing neighborhoods and new housing developments by encouraging and fostering the maintenance and upkeep of existing housing.

Policy 2.1: Assure a Quality Housing Stock for Residents

Ensure a safe and adequate housing stock for residents and improve substandard housing conditions.

Action 2.1.1: Support Incentive Programs for the Rehabilitation of Housing

Support incentive programs for rehabilitation or replacement of deteriorating housing stock.

Action 2.1.2: Undertake Regular Review of the Livability Code and Enhance Enforcement

Undertake and regularly review the County's livability code to gauge the relevance and adequacy of the ordinance. Enhance enforcement of the County's livability code to meet demands for substandard housing.

Action 2.1.3: Support Housing Improvement and Homeownership

Support housing improvement and homeownership through new county programs. Needed programs could be

identified through the Housing Study (Action 1.1.2) of the survey of housing support program users (Action 1.8.1). This includes monitoring and applying for state and federal resources to support these efforts.

Action 2.1.4: Enforce Existing Quality and Safety Regulations

Enforce existing regulations that assure adequate privacy and comfort, safety from fire, flood and other hazards, and protection from health threats.

Action 2.1.5: Require Demolition or Protections of Unsafe or Abandoned Structures

Require owners to demolish or adequately provide protections from the hazards of unsafe structures and abandoned uses.

Action 2.1.6: Advertise Available State Home Repair Programs

Provide outreach to homeowners in the county that have need for home repairs to educate them about available state home repair programs that can provide financial or other types of assistance.

GOAL 3: FOSTER RURAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION

Continue to support the protection of rural lands and neighborhoods that carry economic importance and historic character in St. Mary's County.

Policy 3.1: Preserve Neighborhood Character by Ensuring that New Housing Units are Compatible with Existing Rural Neighborhoods

Preserve the character of existing rural neighborhoods through compatible

housing development and design standards that reflect local context and history. This is supported through the application of the Residential Neighborhood Conservation (RNC) zoning district.

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GOAL 4: ENHANCE COMMUNITY CHARACTER OF EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS AND SUPPORT QUALITY DESIGN OF NEW NEIGHBORHOODS

Foster the protection of neighborhood character by revitalizing existing communities and ensuring new development integrates seamlessly through high-quality design that respects the local context.

Policy 4.1: Include Stakeholder Input in Planning Processes

Continue including stakeholder input in planning processes for development of new neighborhoods. This includes residents from adjacent and nearby neighborhoods, owners and workers, as well as nearby business centers, and representatives from nearby institutions.

Action 4.1.1: Evaluate Ways to Augment Traditional Notification Requirements for Residential Development Projects

Evaluate ways to improve notification of area residents regarding proposed residential developments within an approximate distance of the project site. Include homeowners associations (HOAs) and HOA leadership in notifications. Encourage developers to hold community meetings with nearby neighborhoods to share information about the proposed project.

Policy 4.2: Enhance Existing Neighborhood Patterns through Construction and Renovation of Housing

Encourage construction and renovation of housing units to enhance and respect

existing patterns and character of neighborhood.

Policy 4.3: Support Improvements to Existing Neighborhoods that Increase Safety and Walkability

Support capital investments in existing, older neighborhoods to incorporate needed wheel-chair accessible sidewalks, street trees, signage, street lights, and traffic calming measures that can provide a safer neighborhood environment and promote walkability.

Action 4.3.1: Conduct an Audit of Public-Rights-of-Way Assets in Older Neighborhoods

Conduct an audit of older neighborhoods built during or prior to the early 2000s to determine which neighborhoods are lacking public-rights-of-way assets (sidewalks, street trees, signage, street lights, and traffic calming measures).

Action 4.3.2: Consider Funding Options for Investing in Neighborhood Improvements

Consider local special taxing districts and other options as funding mechanisms to support neighborhood capital investments for public-rights-of-way assets.

Policy 4.4: Develop Mixed Use Communities to Increase Sense of Community

As guided by the Land Use Map (LUM), increase the sense of community and reduce the need for automobile travel by developing mixed use neighborhoods which integrate housing and neighborhood-serving commercial that is walkable, accessible safely by bike, and potentially served by public transportation. These communities should be designed through a master planning approach to maximize internal connectivity and provide a range of housing options. These developments can support “complete neighborhood” objectives, depending on the size of the development, with the intent of providing a mix of residential, recreational, shopping, dining, and service uses that support residents’ daily needs.

Action 4.4.1: Prepare Design Guidelines to Guide Development of New Neighborhoods

Prepare design guidelines to articulate for residential developers the elements of projects that the county would like to see developed, including:

- Maintain picturesque landscapes when locating housing.
- Improve degraded areas by providing landscape amenities.
- Provide open space that supports neighborhood connectivity, access to natural areas, passive recreation, and

reduces stormwater and flooding impacts.

- Create a sense of identity and place for residents through architectural standards.
- Include neighborhood amenities, such as parks, trails, club houses and recreational amenities. For larger developments, support inclusion of neighborhood scale retail uses.
- Create an interconnected street, pedestrian, and biking network.
- Provide a variety of housing types.

Policy 4.5: Encourage a Mix of Opportunities for Passive and Active Recreation

Encourage a mix of private and public amenities and opportunities for passive and active recreation within neighborhoods, including but not limited to:

- Parks and green spaces
- Walking and biking trails
- Community centers and libraries
- Public transit access
- Public waterway access

Policy 4.6: Locate Residential Developments to Increase Environmental Sensitivity and Accessibility

Locate residential developments so as to avoid environmentally sensitive areas and increase access to public transportation.

Policy 4.7: Promote Open-Space Oriented Site Designs with Recreational and Community Services Facilities

Promote and enhance open space-oriented site designs (cluster subdivisions), particularly within Residential Low-Density land use categories, with emphasis on recreational amenities and the provision of public and private community services and facilities.

Policy 4.8: Promote, Recognize, and Reward Good Design

Promote, recognize, and reward good design.

Action 4.8.1: Develop a Program to Incentivize Enhanced Design

Develop and establish a program that encourages and incentivizes design of developments that exceed CZO requirements. Strategies include:

- Provide increased bonus densities for enhanced design of "complete neighborhoods" located within the Development Districts.
- Planning Commission recognition for innovative and effective community design.
- Chesapeake Bay Community recognition of "Bay Friendly" environmental design.
- Support green building design for energy efficiency and long-term affordability of the housing.

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GOAL 5: SUPPORT FISCAL EFFICIENCY BY REQUIRING DEVELOPERS TO PROVIDE NEEDED INFRASTRUCTURE FOR NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Require developers to provide essential infrastructure for new development to reduce financial burden on existing residents and support the County's fiscal efficiency.

Policy 5.1: Require Developers to Meet Public and Community Facilities and Services Requirements

Require housing developers to meet adequate public and community facilities and services requirements for residential projects. These services include but are not limited to:

- Connections to public water/sewer
- Road or intersection improvements to mitigate traffic
- Development of public transit stops
- Incorporation of sidewalks and bicycle paths and parking into street design
- Incorporation of safe public rights-of-way and street designs for school bus stop pick up areas

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4

Economic Development Element

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[Working Lands](#)

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Planning for Economic Development

St. Mary's County has a thriving economy poised to become even stronger. A high concentration of aviation, unmanned systems, and related research occupations; a foundation in agriculture and aquaculture, and the expansion of tourism and advanced manufacturing have blended together to support a flourishing economy. It is notable that of the more than 36,000 jobs in St. Mary's County, the majority of jobs are occupied by residents. Similarly, the majority of working county residents hold jobs in the county. These jobs are clustered within the county's Growth Areas and dispersed in rural lands.

As St. Mary's County continues to grow, a sustained strategic focus and high levels of collaboration between County departments and employment partners will be key for further advancing the economy of St. Mary's County.

National and Regional Trends

Shifting Retail Landscape

Across the country, increasing online shopping and e-commerce have come at the expense of physical retail locations and increased vacancies in shopping centers. While St. Mary's County is not immune to this trend, it is less affected than other locations since most of its occupations are based in the information economy, with roles in engineering, business and financial operations, computer and mathematical roles, and office and administrative support. Such economic shifts emphasize the importance of diversification — overreliance on one type of role can become a liability.

Agricultural Lands Under Threat

Nationally, agricultural lands are rapidly being converted for residential uses, resulting in the loss of farmland and the local agriculture sector. St. Mary's County has significant agricultural lands and is facing growth pressure with its steady population growth. Fortunately, the County has a long history of agricultural land preservation efforts, and its strategy for growth directs urban and suburban development to primary Growth Areas and away from rural and agricultural lands. Continuing to protect agricultural land and support access to local markets strengthens the resilience of food systems of the county while preserving a key component of the county's rural identity and local economy.

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

The St. Mary's County Department of Economic Development (DED) has a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that is regularly updated to guide the County's initiatives to advance economic growth, resilience, and quality of life. When decisions relating to economic development are being considered, the CEDS and this Comprehensive Plan should be used together to guide the decision-making process. This strategy identifies four key areas for economic development focus:

- Grow emerging and heritage industries;
- Attract and retain a young, talented, and diverse workforce;
- Create a nurturing environment for innovation and entrepreneurship; and
- Support and advance the mission of NAS Patuxent River and tenant commands.

Key Findings from Public Engagement

The economic development policies and actions in this chapter were developed in consideration of these factors and as guided by community engagement, stakeholder meetings, and County leadership.

Several important key takeaways emerged from this participation effort and an analysis of current conditions in St. Mary's County, which are described in more detail below.

Industry Diversification

While community members expressed gratitude and support for the continuing presence of NAS Patuxent River and the related industries it attracts, many expressed interest in broadening the types of jobs and industries in St. Mary's County to increase resilience to economic shocks.

Small Businesses

Community members expressed a strong desire to support and promote small, locally owned businesses. Support for small businesses was juxtaposed with the lack of support for large chain stores — community members generally wanted to limit the expansion of national retailers.

Expanding Tourism

Tourism was identified by community members as a potential area of economic expansion. Historical sites, outdoor recreation opportunities, and agritourism were all noted as existing strengths of St. Mary's County that could be leveraged for tourism. Cultural learning programs, local history recognition, and community festivals could serve tourists and residents alike.

Maintaining Rural Character

Economic growth that maintains rural character was important to many residents. Local traditions, such as farming and watermen culture, should be promoted and protected. Amish and Mennonite communities, which have a deep history in the county, were identified

as important to the county's rural culture. Community members stressed that town centers and village gathering spaces should be developed in a walkable, community-centered way, with downtown Leonardtown as a good example of development consistent with rural character.



DIVERSE ECONOMY

GOAL 1: CONTINUE TO PROTECT, ENHANCE, AND DIVERSIFY THE COUNTY'S ECONOMIC BASE

Continue to protect, enhance, and diversify the county's economic base to ensure long-term stability and prosperity, in line with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Policy 1.1: Encourage Collaboration between the Departments of Economic Development and Land Use and Growth Management to Strengthen Local Businesses

Collaboration between the St. Mary's County Department of Economic Development and the Department of Land Use and Growth Management will support the expansion of both small and large businesses to strengthen the commercial tax base, which will both lower the tax burden on residential properties and provide more job opportunities for county residents.

Policy 1.2: Strengthen Collaboration with the Navy to Support Retention and Expansion of Defense Industries

Pursue the retention and expansion of existing defense-related industries, which are critical to the economy of St. Mary's County. Work with the Navy to understand and support its continued operation in St. Mary's County. This work should be in line with the County's CEDS.

Action 1.2.1: Work with the Navy on Recommended Noise Contours and AICUZ Overlays

Avoid development impacts around NAS Patuxent River and Webster Field that might threaten their continued operation through the use of Air Installations Compatible Use Zones (AICUZ) and other appropriate tools.

Policy 1.3: Support New and Existing Businesses in the Innovation Economy

Accommodate the building of new and the expansion of existing businesses in the innovation economy space, including technology firms, in line with the County's CEDS.

Action 1.3.1: Provide Incentives, Training, and Other Tools to Encourage Business Growth and Diversification

Encourage business growth and diversification, including established technology firms to increase non-defense work, with incentives, training, and other tools.

Action 1.3.2: Market To and Recruit High-Quality Enterprises

Attract high-quality businesses through marketing and recruitment of enterprises with high asset and high wage levels. Potential industry sectors include green design and construction, international marketing, research and technology, and companies with an express interest in commercializing technologies currently used in defense or government-only applications.

Policy 1.4: Implement the AeroPark Innovation District Master Plan

Implement the AeroPark Innovation District Master Plan to attract more advanced manufacturing, aviation, and unmanned and autonomous systems businesses both within the district and across the county. Implementation efforts should align with the County's CEDS. Evaluate the AeroPark Innovation District Master Plan every three to five years.

Policy 1.5: Ensure Appropriately Zoned Land is Available for New Office, Commercial, Industrial, and Mixed-Use Development

Ensure that there is enough appropriately zoned land within Growth Areas available for new office, commercial, industrial, and mixed-use development and redevelopment, in line with the County's CEDS.

Policy 1.6: Revitalize Established Businesses and Commercial Centers in Designated Growth Areas

Take advantage of existing infrastructure and available public services by promoting redevelopment of commercial centers in designated Growth Areas and revitalizing established businesses, in line with the County's CEDS and with Growth Management Policy 1.3: Protect Naval Flight Operations through Land Use Planning.

Action 1.6.1: Update the Zoning Ordinance to Facilitate Mixed-Use Redevelopment

Update district and use regulations to encourage for redevelopment of aging shopping areas to include residential development alongside commercial, office, or other appropriate use types.

Policy 1.7: When Updating Commercial Centers, Prioritize Existing Small Businesses and Attracting Locally Owned Businesses

In commercial revitalization projects, encourage mixed-use development that first considers existing small business or attracts locally owned businesses as a part of the revitalized community. Example solutions include plans to find temporary or permanent nearby locations for existing businesses that are being displaced, and discounted rents for local businesses that relocate to the revitalized center.

GOAL 2: CENTER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TALENT ATTRACTION AS CORE STRATEGIES

Center workforce development and talent attraction as core economic development strategies. Promote the county and region as an emerging employment center of a highly educated and skilled workforce. These efforts will align with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Policy 2.1: Work with Local Partners to Support and Expand Workforce Development Programs

Work with local partners to support and expand workforce development programs, especially those in the technology and advanced manufacturing sectors, to ensure job employment skills are available to meet existing and new technology requirements. Provide support for vulnerable populations seeking higher education and training opportunities.

Action 2.1.1: Develop Partnerships to Support Employment Opportunities for Vulnerable Populations

Proactively develop partnerships with local business and employment groups to foster and support employment opportunities for vulnerable populations.

Action 2.1.2: Support Programs That Connect Students with Employment Opportunities

Work with education systems, local employers, and service providers to create a seamless transition for youth and adults from school to employment opportunities.

Policy 2.2: Recognize the Needs of Emerging Families

Recognize the needs of emerging families, such as affordable day care and workforce housing, when considering how to draw in new talent, and work with partners to help meet such needs so the county is an even more attractive place for workers and businesses.

Policy 2.3: Plan for Recreational and Cultural Amenities to Improve Quality of Life

Collaboratively plan for recreational and cultural amenities that improve the quality of life for existing and future residents, and include arts and cultural elements in the planning process.

Attracting a young, talented, and diverse workforce would set St. Mary's County apart from otherwise similar counties and attract employers.

Action 2.3.1: Attract Businesses Supporting Recreation and a High Quality of Life

Attract and retain young professionals and families through business offerings. Target specialized retailers and other businesses such as a movie theater, bookstore, outdoor recreation provider, indoor recreation

provider, and arts enterprises. Support additional shopping options for students at St. Mary's College.

Action 2.3.2: Encourage Public Art and Art Installations

Support the incorporation of public art and art installations in and around public

buildings and spaces, using clear selection criteria and community-informed review processes to ensure appropriateness, inclusivity, and compatibility with facility use.

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GOAL 3: RECOGNIZE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SMALL BUSINESSES TO QUALITY OF LIFE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Recognize the contributions of small businesses to both quality of life and economic development, and advance policies that encourage more unique, locally owned businesses to open, in line with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Policy 3.1: Create and Execute County-Wide Initiatives to Support Small Businesses

Work with partners on county-wide initiatives that support and market existing small businesses. Support start-ups and early-stage technology companies, and create opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Action 3.1.1: Streamline the Development Approval Process

Update and streamline the development approval process to reduce the time between receiving an application and issuing a permit. Promote this process to local small businesses.

Action 3.1.2: Support Co-Working Spaces

Encourage and support shared work spaces where entrepreneurs, freelancers, and startups can work side by side, exchange ideas, and collaborate. Co-working spaces can provide affordable and flexible workspace, access to shared equipment and technology, and opportunities for networking and mentorship. These spaces can build a supportive network that nurtures innovation

while lowering barriers for new and emerging businesses.

To encourage entrepreneurial endeavors and startups, support co-working spaces that can foster creativity, mentorship, workspace, and access to resources.

Policy 3.2: Create Public-Private Partnerships to Support Existing and New Small Businesses

Collaborate with the private sector to offer support for existing and new small businesses. Build on existing programs to incentivize the development of new small businesses in all parts of the county, particularly when commercial sites are redeveloped.

Policy 3.3: Provide Expanded Opportunities for Rural Services, Industrial, and Entrepreneurial Activities

Enable farmers to supplement their agricultural incomes with small-scale cottage industries, such as cabinet making or welding shops. Such supplemental income production activities should be at a scale or intensity which will not unduly change the

character of the area. Also support daily commercial services needs of rural residents by supporting rural-scale retail in appropriate locations.

Action 3.3.1: Update The Zoning Ordinance to Allow Appropriate Small Business Ventures in Agricultural Areas

Increase the allowable uses in agricultural districts to encourage appropriate small business ventures. Establish standards to

prevent negative impacts on adjoining properties. When possible, minimize restrictions for businesses on farms.

Policy 3.4: Support Local Businesses to Become More Resilient to Future Hazards

In an effort to support pre-disaster preparedness, support and educate local businesses to become more resilient to future hazards.

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HERITAGE AND OUTDOOR RECREATION TOURISM

GOAL 4: SUPPORT AND EXPAND TOURISM

Support and emphasize existing, unique county assets and rural setting to expand tourism and bring more tax revenue into the county, in line with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Policy 4.1: Maintain, Promote, and Expand Historic Sites, Historic Districts, Museums, and Other Cultural Resources

Maintain, promote, and expand historic sites, historic districts, museums, and heritage resources. Support public and private efforts, collaborating with partners such as St. Mary's College and St. Mary's City to identify historic buildings, areas, or assets for designation or preservation.

Action 4.1.1: Promote Heritage Education

Expand and promote heritage education, using natural and cultural resources of the Southern Maryland heritage area to communicate the importance of the resources to the quality of life.

Action 4.1.2: Regularly Update and Maintain an Inventory of Natural, Recreational, Historical, and Cultural Resources in The County

Collaborate with tourism to regularly update the inventory of resources available on the Yes St. Mary's website. Both sites can be a tool for tourism and recreation, education and research, preservation and conservation, and economic development.

Action 4.1.3: Update Existing and Add Additional Signage to Promote, Link, and Interpret Sites

Increase ease of access to natural, recreational, historical, and cultural resources in the county by updating existing and adding additional signage to promote, link, and interpret tourism sites. Consider adding site information at county entrances.

Action 4.1.4: Document the Significance of Structures Slated for Demolition

Review and document the historic and architectural significance of all structures slated for demolition that are fifty years or older.

Action 4.1.5: Document Local Cultural Traditions Through the St. Mary's County Historical Society

Collaborate with the St. Mary's County Historical Society to document local cultural traditions.

Action 4.1.6: Promote the Designation of and Investment in Historical Sites, Historic Districts, and Heritage Resources

Promote recognition of and financial investment in heritage resources to foster a strong sense of history and place and to increase economic opportunity and revenues

for all segments of the economy. This includes pursuing official State and Federal recognition of the County's historic sites, heritage areas, arts and entertainment districts, and eligible roads and their vicinities. Programs include the National Park Service's Chesapeake Gateways program, National Register of Historic Places, Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties, Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, Maryland Arts and Entertainment Districts, Maryland's Scenic Byways (Religious Freedom and Star-Spangled Banner), and Maryland Historic Trust Certified Local Government Status.

Action 4.1.7: Provide Local Tax Incentives for the Preservation of Important Historical and Cultural Resources

Encourage the private sector preservation of historical and cultural resources through local tax incentives.

Action 4.1.8: Inform Landowners of the Resources Available for Conservation and Adaptive Reuse of Significant Historic Structures

Help landowners understand the resources available for conservation and adaptive reuse of significant historic structures. One such resource is the Maryland Historical Trust grants, which provide incentives to foster the preservation or restoration of significant structures.

Action 4.1.9: Support a New Interpretive Center/Visitors Center

Support the opening of the new Interpretive Center/Visitors Center, highlighting the stories of the indigenous, African American

and first European settlers in Maryland. Additionally, find opportunities to support a new hotel in development on the site ahead of Maryland's 400th anniversary. Examine the feasibility of locating the center near Charlotte Hall.

Policy 4.2: Protect Natural, Recreational, Historical, and Cultural Assets Through the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance

Update and use the tools in the CZO to protect natural, recreational, historical, and cultural assets.

Action 4.2.1: Utilize the Historic Landmarks and Districts Overlay in the CZO and Protect Other Important Areas

Work with interested property owners to designate historic sites and historic districts in the CZO using the existing Historic Landmarks and Districts Overlay. The 18th-century village section of Charlotte Hall is an example of an appropriate historic district. Protect the scenic roads and corridors identified in the Historic Roads Survey. Identify and protect the County's natural and rural viewsheds.

Action 4.2.2: Require Identification and Documentation of Archeological Sites on a Property Prior to Any Disturbance of The Site

Require the identification and documentation of cemeteries, burial grounds, and archeological sites on a property prior to any disturbance of the site.

Action 4.2.3: Encourage Compatible Development in Designated Historic Districts

Update the CZO to encourage compatible development in historic districts. Explore the creation of performance standards to minimize impacts on surrounding properties. Adopt design guidelines for all locally designated historic sites and districts.

Action 4.2.4: Promote Adaptive Reuse of Historic Structures

Update the Historic Preservation Commission's design standards. Consider establishing a nonconforming use provision that allows long vacant structures which are documented and designated as having both historic and architectural significance to be renovated in a manner consistent with maintaining historic and architectural integrity and to be occupied with uses that are compatible with their historic purpose and use.

Action 4.2.5: Ensure Implementation of Ordinance Requirements for Protection of Designated Scenic and Historic Corridors

Verify compliance with requirements in the CZO related to the protection of designated scenic and historic corridors, including historic bridges.

Policy 4.3: Leverage Existing Historic Assets to Promote Tourism

Leverage existing historic assets and locations with a strong sense of place. Tap into increased interest in historic

assets leading up to Maryland's 400th anniversary in 2034.

Action 4.3.1: Encourage Small Businesses Near Historic Sites and Rural Crossroads

Seek creative ways to foster business development at historic sites and important county crossroads such as Ridge, Clements, and Chaptico, while respecting Critical Areas and other regulations that limit use.

Policy 4.4: Expand Tourist-Oriented Businesses

As supported by the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), encourage and support tourist-oriented shops, restaurants, lodging, conference facilities, motor sports facilities, and recreation, especially businesses oriented towards the natural and historical assets of the county. For recreation, emphasize service providers for activities like hiking, biking, fishing, kayaking, boating, and tours of historical sites. Consider support of tourism-based businesses or filming opportunities through tax incentives.

Policy 4.5: Improve Existing Parks and Encourage Development of New Parks

Maintain and improve existing county-owned parks, and encourage the development of new parks—especially on the water—to expand access for residents while attracting visitors who are seeking outdoor recreation options.

Action 4.5.1: Maintain and Improve County-Owned Parks

Invest in maintenance and improvements to existing County-owned parks.

Action 4.5.2: Support New Parks and Parks Improvement Efforts for State and National Parks, Monuments, and Trail Networks

Support new and ongoing planning efforts to maximize the public benefits of parks, monuments, and trail networks in St. Mary's County, including the Chesapeake Gateways and Watertrails Network, the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, and all County and State parks.

Policy 4.6: Encourage High-Quality and Contextually Appropriate Architectural Design and District Character

Support high-quality and contextually appropriate architectural design to

positively impact tourism and quality of life. Support the incorporation of public art and art spaces where appropriate, working closely with the St. Mary's County Arts Council and Economic Development.

Action 4.6.1: Support Leonardtown in Developing Contextually Appropriate Mixed-Use Areas

Support Leonardtown in encouraging owners and developers of single-story buildings in the town core to add upper stories for mixed use and consider supporting similar styles of development in other populated areas of the county. Expand the network of Art and Entertainment Districts in St. Mary's County through support of Leonardtown's current district and through considering similar districts in other parts of the county.

WORKING LANDS

GOAL 5: PROMOTE A ROBUST, DIVERSE AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY SECTOR

Promote a robust, diverse agriculture, aquaculture, fishing, and forestry sector that preserves open spaces and strengthens traditional farming, in line with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).



Policy 5.1: Focus on Financial Incentives to Help Farmers Keep Farming

Focus on financial incentives to help farmers keep farming and to support young people who are getting their start as farmers and need small business support. Provide governmental incentives and policies that encourage continued major acreage in traditional and alternative crops. Provide economic incentives and land planning to stabilize the presence of the Amish and Mennonite farming community.

Action 5.1.1: Expand Farm-to-School Purchasing Program

Expand the existing farm-to-school purchasing program to support stable local markets for farm products.

Policy 5.2: Support Agritourism Opportunities

Support agritourism opportunities, such as farm stays, events, roadside stands, recreation farms, pick-your-own produce outlets, craft beverage production with local products (such as wineries, distilleries, and breweries), corn and hay mazes, farm life demonstrations, or community fairs.

Policy 5.3: Support Agriculture Through Updated County Regulations

Ensure that County regulations are not preventing agricultural businesses success.

Action 5.3.1: Streamline the Development Review Process for Agricultural Businesses

To the extent practicable, streamline development review processes for agricultural uses to ensure the viability and flexibility of agricultural businesses.

Action 5.3.2: Update Agricultural Uses and Definitions

Update the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO) to support the development of new agricultural support uses, such as small-scale meat processing, agricultural product distribution centers, produce packing hubs, and value-added agriculture generally. Ensure that the agriculture-related definitions in the CZO are at least as expansive as those in state statute, referring to state statute as necessary.

Policy 5.4: Explore New Transportation-Related Policies that Support Farming

Study and explore new transportation-related policies that support farming, such as requiring the construction of wider road shoulders when roads are reconstructed, to better support farm vehicles, carts, and buggies used by the Amish and Mennonite farmers.

Policy 5.5: Pursue Alternative Crops and Markets

Increase education about and production of specialty crops for urban, regional, and niche markets with emphasis on locally grown and raised. Provide increased marketing opportunities for locally grown products. Re-examine new uses of preserved agricultural land for profitability in a post tobacco production era.

Examples of specialty crops include grapes and other fruits for wine; flowers; herbs, ornamentals, and other nursery plants; organic produce and high value vegetables and fruits.

Policy 5.6: Support Forestry Programs that Sustain Private Forests

Support the continuance of private forests to produce lumber and wood products while maintaining rural open space, wildlife habitat, and water quality.

Action 5.6.1: Encourage Landowner and County Participation in Forest and Woodlands Programs

Encourage the participation of landowners and the County in state and federal programs that enhance and protect forests and woodlands, support silviculture activities, and provide financial incentives for retaining forests. Such programs include cost share programs, tax incentive programs for conservation and management, education programs, and technical assistance programs.

MINERAL RESOURCES

GOAL 6: PROMOTE AND PROTECT APPROPRIATE MINING ACTIVITY

Promote and protect the continued economic viability of the mining industry and mineral resources in St. Mary's County, in line with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Policy 6.1: Support Mining Activities While Minimizing Potential Negative Impacts

Support continued economic viability of mining activity in the county, while ensuring that the impacts of mining on neighboring areas are minimized as much as possible.

Action 6.1.1: Encourage the Conversion of Residential Mining Sites to Recreational Areas

Review existing regulations and update as necessary to ensure that negative physical

impacts, water quality impacts, and visual impacts are avoided or mitigated. This includes removal of vegetation, soil disturbance, and grading. Enforce mining-related regulations to ensure that mining activity complies with all applicable standards and procedures.

FISHERIES

GOAL 7: SUPPORT FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE ACTIVITIES

Enhance fish stock and markets for local watermen and enhance recreational fishing opportunities by supporting fisheries and aquaculture activities, in line with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Policy 7.1: Invest in and Maintain Aquaculture Opportunities

Seek aquaculture investment, maintain existing aquaculture activities, and restore overworked areas to support the local aquaculture economy and culture.

Action 7.1.1: Support Local, State, and Regional Efforts to Effectively Manage and Regulate Aquaculture Activities for Continued Productivity

Work with Maryland and neighboring states to share equitable laws to regulate fishing, crabbing, and oystering, and to effectively manage commercial harvesting for continued productivity. Assist in regional and local efforts to restore fish and shellfish populations and habitats, and to prevent recurrence of such overworking.

Action 7.1.2: Provide Infrastructure and Support Related Uses for a More Robust Fishing Industry

Provide infrastructure such as landings and docks, and support locally available processing facilities, to increase both saltwater and freshwater aquaculture production.

Policy 7.2: Support and Expand Recreational Fishing Opportunities

Support and expand recreational fishing opportunities, including encouraging fee-paying freshwater fishing ponds and lakes.

Policy 7.3: Maintain Adequate Fish and Shellfish Stocks for Commercial and Recreational Fishing and Shellfish Harvesting

Prevent overfishing and control the spread of invasive species to maintain adequate fish and shellfish stocks for aquaculture and for recreational fishing. Rebuild overfished stocks in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

5

Environment and Natural Resources Element

In This Section

- Planning for the Environment and Natural Resources
- Sensitive Areas & Areas of Critical State Concern
- Priority Preservation Areas
- Water Resources



Planning for the Environment and Natural Resources

This element establishes the County's framework for protecting natural systems while directing growth toward areas with existing services. It converts community priorities into a unified strategy that safeguards the Chesapeake Bay, shorelines, forests, wetlands, working lands, and scenic landscapes. It aligns conservation actions with the comprehensive plan's emphasis on intentional, place-efficient growth.

Key Findings from Public Engagement

Values and Long-Range Vision

Participants consistently emphasized five priorities: preserving rural character and farmland; protecting waterways, wetlands, and the Chesapeake Bay while improving public access; preventing sprawl by focusing growth in existing centers; expanding parks, trails, and green spaces; and sustaining agriculture and aquaculture. Residents also called for climate resilience, particularly coastal protection and limits on floodplain development. Participants tied environmental protection directly to growth management by keeping rural areas rural, encouraging redevelopment in Development Districts and Town Centers, and investing in infrastructure where it already exists.

There are operational challenges of environmental management: aging septic and sewer infrastructure, coastal hazards, and the need to modernize processes to ensure environmental

review remains efficient and enforceable. The community acknowledged that maintaining growth boundaries and targeting restoration efforts would achieve both economic and ecological goals.

What Data Show

A High-Value, High-Exposure Natural System

The [Trends and Projections analysis](#) documents extensive forests, wetlands, and stream networks that support biodiversity and water quality. Large portions of the County fall within Targeted Ecological Areas (TEAs) and the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, confirming the importance of protecting these lands while managing development along tidal waters and steep slopes. The locations of environmentally sensitive lands, such as the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, can be viewed across multiple layers within the county's publicly-available GIS system.

Agriculture remains central to the County's identity and economy, but continued farmland conversion poses a

risk. Protecting working lands and supporting agri-business diversification are essential to sustaining both local food systems and the County's rural character.

Hazards and Infrastructure

Constraints

Flooding, sea-level rise, drainage failures, and aging septic systems pose growing threats to water quality and property. Aligning development with watershed function, upgrading failing systems, and preventing further fragmentation of forested areas are critical to maintaining resilience and ecological health.

Organizing Logic for this Element

The policies that follow are organized around four complementary lenses that link community vision, data, and State mandates into an implementable framework:

Protect and Connect Core Natural Systems

Prioritize the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area and TEAs, maintain and expand native vegetated buffers, and close green infrastructure gaps that connect habitat cores and headwaters. These efforts enhance biodiversity, water quality, and flood resilience.

Sustain Working Lands as Conservation Partners

Keep farming and aquaculture viable through preservation funding, easements,

and targeted incentives. Support enterprise diversification that reduces conversion pressure and aligns land use policies to protect prime soils and rural landscapes.

Direct Growth to Conserve

Focus on redevelopment and housing within Development Districts and Town Centers. Require environmental site design and clustering to minimize disturbance, reduce impervious surfaces, and safeguard streams and headwaters. This approach upholds the County's tiered growth framework.

Build Climate and Water Resilience

Combine shoreline and floodplain protection with stormwater and septic upgrades, regenerative stream restoration, and habitat recovery for submerged aquatic vegetation and fish. Encourage nature-based designs that reduce risk and restore ecosystem function.

Key Themes Linked to Policies

Critical Areas and Sensitive Lands

Updating Critical Area regulations, mapping habitats, and enforcing protective buffers are central to maintaining ecological integrity and complying with State mandates. This focus ensures that areas most vulnerable

to disturbance (shorelines, wetlands, and tidal transition zones) are identified, monitored, and protected through clear, predictable standards. These measures safeguard biodiversity, water quality, and shoreline stability while providing a foundation for adaptive management as environmental conditions change.

Green Infrastructure

Protecting and connecting natural landscapes requires a comprehensive approach to green infrastructure. By identifying ecological cores and corridors using local and State data, the County can target reforestation and conservation easements to strengthen connectivity between critical habitats. This approach prioritizes headwaters and Stronghold watersheds to maintain ecosystem services such as flood control, nutrient filtration, and wildlife movement. Mapping and closing gaps in the green infrastructure network will also create opportunities for multi-benefit projects that enhance both conservation and community resilience.

Forests and Tree Canopy

Forests are among the County's most valuable assets for biodiversity, water filtration, and carbon sequestration. Implementing a no-net-loss framework for forest cover, combined with strong mitigation requirements for unavoidable clearing, will help prevent fragmentation and maintain ecological function. Expanding urban forestry programs within

Development Districts and Town Centers will further improve air quality, reduce urban heat, and provide aesthetic and recreational value. These coordinated actions ensure that tree canopy and forest resources are managed as essential natural infrastructure rather than secondary amenities.

Wetlands, Streams, and Buffers

Healthy wetlands and riparian systems are vital for water quality, flood mitigation, and habitat continuity. The County's strategy emphasizes requiring native vegetative buffers along all rivers, streams, and tidal or nontidal wetlands to stabilize banks, filter runoff, and provide shade for aquatic species. Alteration of these systems will only be permitted where no feasible alternative exists, and any impacts must be fully mitigated through restoration and replanting. Regenerative stormwater design and targeted restoration of degraded stream segments will return these systems to their natural hydrologic and ecological functions.

Working Lands and Rural Character

Sustaining agriculture, aquaculture, and forestry as viable industries is essential for maintaining rural character and economic stability. The County will continue expanding farmland preservation funding and incentive programs that encourage landowners to protect productive soil through

easements and participation in State and Federal programs. Support for agritourism, local markets, and small-scale producers helps diversify farm income and reduce conversion pressure. Aligning preservation investments with State Targeted Ecological Areas and Rural Legacy priorities ensures that conservation and economic development reinforce each other.

Public Access and Recreation

Enhancing public access to nature complements conservation by connecting residents and visitors to the County's environmental and cultural resources. Expanding greenways, blueways, and trail systems will create continuous corridors linking parks, heritage sites, and waterfront areas. These projects demonstrate best practices in resource stewardship and environmental design, offering educational opportunities while maintaining sensitive habitats. Thoughtful public access planning ensures that recreation and conservation coexist, strengthening community identity and long-term support for environmental protection.

How This Element Will Be Used

Project Review and Permitting

The policies in this element provide a clear framework for evaluating development proposals and public

projects through an environmental lens. They establish measurable standards for buffer widths, site suitability, and mitigation requirements to ensure that project review processes are consistent, transparent, and enforceable. Interagency coordination among planning, public works, environmental services, and health departments will be strengthened so that natural resource protections are integrated early in project design rather than treated as afterthoughts. By embedding environmental considerations into permitting and review, the County can reduce conflicts, accelerate approvals for compliant projects, and ensure that development aligns with long-term conservation objectives.

Capital Investment and Restoration Targeting

This element also serves as a guide for directing capital improvement and restoration efforts to areas where they will yield the greatest environmental and public benefit. Mapping of Targeted Ecological Areas, green infrastructure networks, and hazard-prone lands provides the spatial intelligence needed to prioritize investment in reforestation, stream restoration, and stormwater or septic upgrades. Focusing limited resources in these high-value zones ensures cost-effective outcomes, protecting water quality, enhancing flood resilience, and reducing maintenance burdens on public infrastructure. Over time, these targeted investments will

produce measurable ecological gains while supporting the County's goals for sustainable growth and community resilience.

Growth Management Integration

Environmental protection and growth management are interdependent strategies within this framework. The policies outlined here reinforce the County's tiered land use system by channeling growth and redevelopment toward Development Districts and Town

Centers while conserving the rural landscape. By aligning zoning, infrastructure planning, and resource protection, the County can minimize sprawl, preserve agricultural viability, and reduce infrastructure costs. This integrated approach ensures that conservation outcomes are not isolated initiatives but are embedded within broader planning decisions, resulting in a growth pattern that is both economically efficient and environmentally responsible.



SENSITIVE AREAS & AREAS OF CRITICAL STATE CONCERN

GOAL 1: PROTECT AND ENHANCE SENSITIVE AREAS AND AREAS OF CRITICAL STATE CONCERN

Protect and enhance Areas of Critical State Concern, including the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, State-designated habitats, and other environmentally sensitive lands, to safeguard ecological functions and ensure compliance with State mandates. Sensitive Areas and Areas of Critical State Concern were intentionally grouped under a shared goal because they function as an integrated resource protection system rather than as distinct, unrelated policy domains. Areas of Critical State Concern fall squarely within the statutory intent of §3-104 of the Land Use Article of the *Annotated Code of Maryland*. This structure strengthens policy clarity, reflects on-the-ground implementation, and supports a coordinated approach to environmental stewardship consistent with both local planning objectives and State mandates.

Policy 1.1: Identify and Map Critical Habitats

Continue to map, manage, and monitor critical fish, wildlife, and plant habitats by applying Federal, State, and local resource protection policies within all development activities.

Action 1.1.1: Continue to Map Natural Landscape Features and Sensitive Areas

Use Federal, State, and local datasets to identify and update mapping of streams, wetlands, hydric and erodible soils, floodplains, steep slopes, important forest habitats (including forest interior dwelling species (FIDS) and headwater forests), natural heritage areas, and rare, threatened, or endangered species. Incorporate priority areas such as Stronghold Watersheds identified by the Maryland Biological Stream

Survey. Continue to publish sensitive area mapping through an accessible online tool for use by citizens, consultants, and staff to support project design and review while safeguarding sensitive species. Maintain internal “special project review areas” for staff use and require site-specific evaluations of significant habitats and protected species before development proposals are accepted for review.

Action 1.1.2: Map Green Infrastructure

For rural areas and all lands mapped as green infrastructure by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), develop guidance maps and conservation regulations to sustain agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and aquaculture, and to preserve nature-dominated environments such as wetlands, forests, abandoned fields, stream valleys, floodplains, and habitat protection areas.

Policy 1.2: Conserve Critical Fish, Wildlife, and Plant Habitats

Conserve critical fish, wildlife, and plant habitats by enforcing State programs, habitat protection measures, and voluntary conservation agreements.

Action 1.2.1: Implement the Maryland Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Program Policy

Update and implement the Maryland Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Program (COMAR 27.01.01 - 27.01.14) to ensure compliance with State law, facilitate uniform enforcement, streamline application review, and establish land use and development controls that limit adverse impacts, recognizing that environmental harm may result not only from pollution but also from the scale and intensity of human activity in the Critical Area.

Action 1.2.2: Maintain Riparian Buffers in Accordance with State Standards

For all riverbanks, perennial streams, and intermittent streams within the Critical Area, continue to provide riparian buffers at least 100 feet wide, expanded as necessary for adjacent wetlands, steep slopes, and erodible soils. For intermittent streams outside the Critical Area, provide riparian buffers at least 50 feet wide, expanded as necessary for adjacent wetlands, steep slopes, and erodible soils.

Action 1.2.3: Protect Habitats that Support Species

Protect habitats that support species in need of conservation, including rare, threatened, and endangered species, waterfowl areas,

pollinator habitat, colonial bird nesting sites, forest interior dwelling species, and breeding, feeding, and wintering habitats dependent on the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and coastal environments. Enforce State and Federal requirements for protective buffers and seasonal restrictions on development and other activities near breeding and nesting sites, and promote voluntary conservation through landowner agreements, conservation easements, and tax incentive programs.

Policy 1.3: Maintain and Enhance Forest Cover

Maintain and enhance forest cover throughout the County to protect biological productivity, habitat, and water quality.

Action 1.3.1: Implement the Forest Conservation Act

Continue to implement Maryland's Forest Conservation Act as may be amended from time to time.

Action 1.3.2: Manage Forests to Prevent Loss and Fragmentation

Manage forests to prevent loss and fragmentation through no net loss regulations, sensitive management practices, and mitigation of unavoidable clearing.

Action 1.3.3: Increase Forest and Managed Woodlands Acreage

Increase forest and managed woodlands acreage through land conservation, reforestation, and incentive programs.

Policy 1.4: Protect Wetlands, Streams, and Sensitive Aquatic Habitats

Protect wetlands, rivers, streams, riparian corridors, and sensitive aquatic habitats by maintaining functional native buffers, preserving natural hydrology, limiting disturbance, and restoring degraded systems. Safeguard critical ecosystems, including submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), anadromous fish spawning areas, and tidal transition zones, to support water quality, habitat connectivity, and ecological function.

Action 1.4.1: Require Protective Native Buffers

Require protective, naturally vegetated buffers for wetlands, rivers, streams, shorelines, and tidal and non-tidal wetlands. Buffers shall utilize native species, provide shading, stabilize banks, filter runoff, and be expanded where necessary to protect hydric or erodible soils and sustain wetland hydrology. Disturbance within buffers shall be prohibited unless no feasible alternative exists and shall require substantial mitigation for approved impacts.

Action 1.4.2: Maintain Natural Hydrology

Preserve natural runoff patterns, stormwater flows, and riparian processes to protect hydrological and ecological functions of streams, wetlands, and downstream aquatic systems. Where development contributes runoff to sensitive aquatic areas, require regenerative stormwater design practices that restore natural hydrology and support long-term stream and buffer function.

Action 1.4.3: Strengthen and Restore Riparian, Wetland, and Aquatic Habitats

Enhance riparian corridors, wetlands, and aquatic habitats through planting, restoration, and buffer enhancement programs that improve shading, water quality, and habitat continuity, and create connected wildlife corridors. Prioritize restoration in headwater streams, tidal transition areas, and wetland complexes.

Action 1.4.4: Restore Degraded Streams, Buffers, and Aquatic Vegetation

Where streams, riparian buffers, or wetlands are degraded, require restoration measures that return these systems to their ecological function. Identify and protect submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and anadromous fish spawning areas, and support restoration initiatives, including stakeholder and watermen participation where appropriate.

Action 1.4.5: Prohibit Alteration of Wetlands and Sensitive Aquatic Areas

Prohibit alteration of wetlands, including mowing, filling, ditching, placement of structural stormwater facilities within buffers, or significant modification of natural drainage patterns. Maintain transitional habitats between aquatic and upland communities and protect hydric soils adjacent to wetlands through incorporation into expanded buffers. Require adequate mitigation for any unavoidable impacts.

Action 1.4.6: Protect Submerged Aquatic Habitats

Identify and protect areas of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and anadromous fish spawning waters, and support restoration efforts in historically vegetated areas.

Action 1.4.7: Prioritize Native Buffers in Headwaters, Wetlands, and Tidal Transition Zones

Focus on planting and restoration efforts to create continuous native buffers in headwater streams, tidal transition areas, and wetland complexes, with designs that enhance shade, stabilize banks, and improve water quality. Where buffer disturbance is proposed, require identification of feasible alternatives prior to approval.

Policy 1.5: Minimize Impact on Sensitive Areas Through Development Review

Action 1.5.1: Ensure Compliance with Natural Resource Protection Policies

Require all County agencies and departments to ensure compliance with

natural resource protection policies during project review and approval.

Action 1.5.2: Use Environmental Site Design

Require new development to use environmental site design (ESD) practices to maximize onsite infiltration and habitat protection and encourage regenerative stormwater management where structural controls are unavoidable.

Action 1.5.3: Minimize Disturbance in Development

Limit land disturbance before final approvals; cluster development to reduce impervious surfaces and protect stream watersheds.

Action 1.5.4: Limit Development in the Critical Area Buffer

Restrict new development activities in the 100-foot Buffer to water-dependent uses. Revise nonconforming use standards to allow site improvements that reduce impacts and improve water quality.

PRIORITY PRESERVATION AREAS

GOAL 2: MAINTAIN FARMING AS A VIABLE ECONOMIC ENGINE

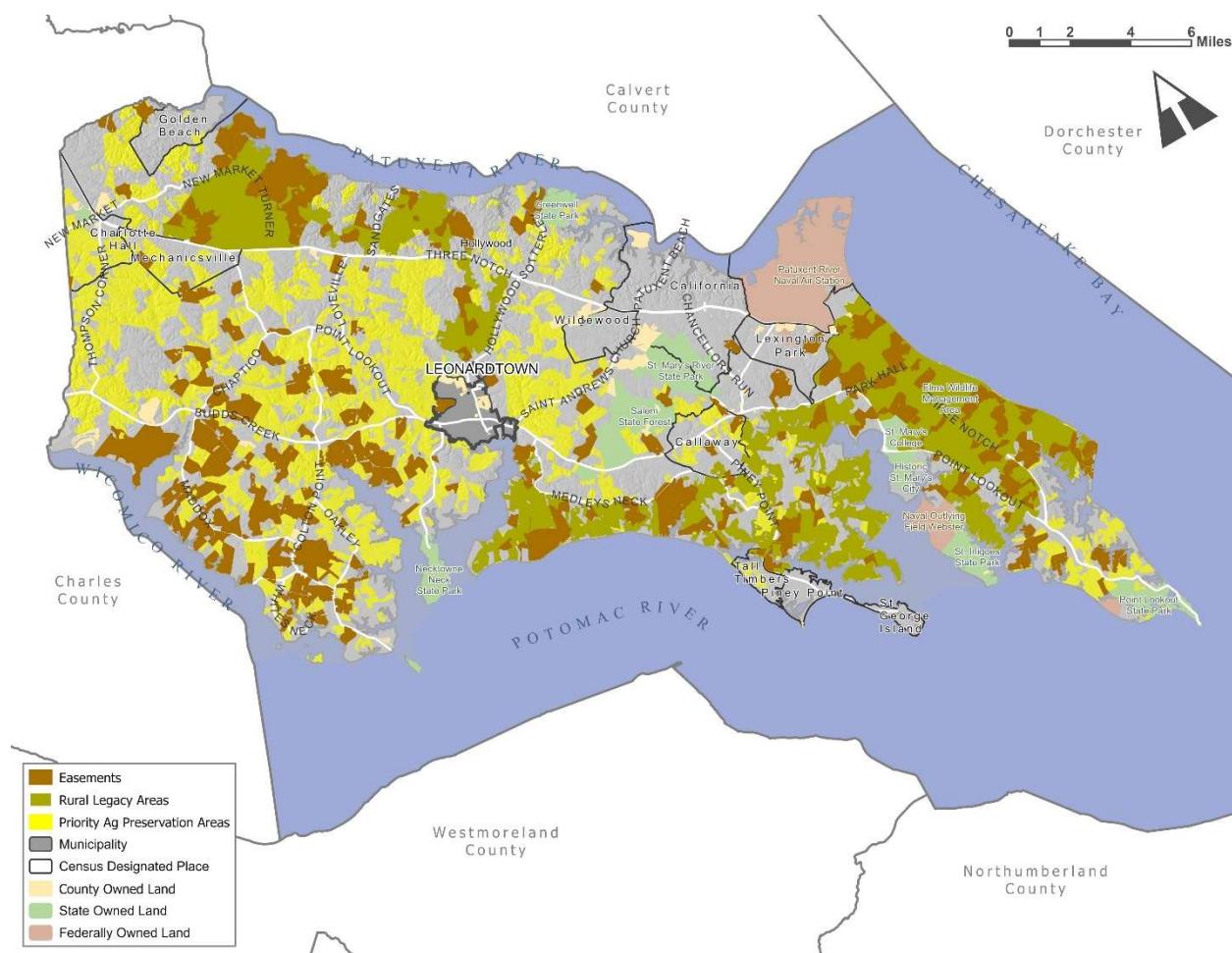
Maintain farming as a viable and resilient industry that supports local food production, strengthens the rural economy, and sustains the working landscapes of St. Mary's County.

Policy 2.1: Retain Agricultural Land Uses and Protect Priority Farmland

Retain agricultural land uses and preserve prime farmland and woodland

soils to keep farming viable and maintain the Priority Preservation Area (protect 80% of the 97,660-acre area).

Figure 4: Rural and Agricultural Preservation Areas, including Priority Preservation Areas



Action 2.1.1: Limit Growth in Rural Areas

Limit growth in rural areas to preserve open space and support agriculture and forestry by exploring an Agricultural Overlay floating zone with density reductions and standards, paired with incentives such as Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs) density bonuses and expanded permitted uses to supplement farm income.

Action 2.1.2: Promote Transferrable Development Rights (TDR) Program

Continue to invest in the removal of development rights from agricultural parcels through private-market Transferrable Development Rights (TDRs), the purchase or donation of conservation easements, the support for land trust partnerships, and the implementation of voluntary agricultural overlays with incentives to sustain farm and forestry operations.

Action 2.1.3: Expand Farmland Preservation Funding and Programs

Continue to expand farmland preservation by sustaining the Agricultural District Program (including five-year agreements where applicable) and leveraging multiple funding sources — county recordation tax revenues, TDR fee-in-lieu funds (directed to Priority Preservation Areas), installment purchase agreements, and matched State/Federal funding — to achieve preservation goals and ensure long-term protection of farmland.

Action 2.1.4: Meet the Priority Preservation Area Target

Reaffirm the County's commitment to preserve at least 80% of the 97,660-acre Priority Preservation Area (PPA) by 2040

through Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) easements, Rural Legacy acquisitions, County transfer-tax programs, TDR retirements, and land-trust partnerships. Publish an annual PPA progress map and report showing acres protected, contracts pending, and funding sources leveraged.

Policy 2.2: Foster Expansion of Agricultural and Aquaculture Industries

Promote the growth and profitability of agriculture and aquaculture through supportive policies, incentives, and diversification of farm enterprises.

Action 2.2.1: Create Local Incentives

Develop and implement local incentives, zoning tools, and taxing policies to preserve farmland, including establishment of a Critical Farms program.

Action 2.2.2: Promote Best Management Practices

Require and promote best management practices in farming, forestry, and aquaculture to reduce soil erosion, minimize nutrient and chemical runoff, and protect water quality and habitats.

Action 2.2.3: Promote Participation in Conservation Funding Programs

Publicize and promote landowner participation in State and Federal funding programs for cover crops, fencing, manure management, nutrient management, and other practices that conserve soils, improve productivity, and protect water quality. Potential Federal funding sources include the

Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Policy 2.3: Leverage and Target Farmland and Forestland Preservation Programs

Maximize the use of State, County, and land trust programs to permanently protect farmland and forests, directing investments to high-priority areas that sustain agriculture, forestry, and rural character.

Action 2.3.1: Expand Participation in Preservation Programs

Continue to facilitate and promote landowner enrollment in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), Rural Legacy Program, Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program, and County preservation programs.

Action 2.3.2: Maximize Available Easement Funding

Continue to fully utilize State agricultural transfer taxes, County recording taxes, and other dedicated funds to purchase permanent easements on prime farmland and woodland.

Action 2.3.3: Target Priority Lands

Continue to pursue MALPF, Rural Legacy, and County transfer tax funds to purchase easements restricting development on prime farmland, woodlands, and green infrastructure gaps identified in Action 3.1.2: Map and Close Green Infrastructure “Gaps” with Multi-Benefit Projects below.

Action 2.3.4: Align Investments with Federal, State, and Land Trust Priorities

Prioritize County preservation funds for properties that fall within State Targeted Ecological Areas, Rural Legacy Areas, Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program areas, and land-trust priority maps and that contribute to the PPA goal. Work with the Navy to ensure that farmland and forestland preservation efforts align with federal priorities.

GOAL 3: PROTECT AND CONSERVE SIGNIFICANT RESOURCE AREAS

Protect and conserve significant resource areas, including locally identified green infrastructure, forests, wetlands, streams, scenic landscapes, cultural and historic resources, mineral lands, and shoreline habitats, to sustain biodiversity, community character, and long-term land productivity.

Policy 3.1: Protect Natural Landscapes and Green Infrastructure

Protect and conserve locally significant natural landscapes and green infrastructure networks to maintain ecosystem services, habitat connectivity, and rural character.

Action 3.1.1: Conserve Green Infrastructure in Growth Areas

In planned development areas, identify and map green infrastructure networks to be conserved as open space; coordinate passive recreation with conservation objectives; establish development standards that enhance woodland and forest functions for water quality; and design stormwater facilities as community amenities.

Action 3.1.2: Map and Close Green Infrastructure “Gaps” with Multi-Benefit Projects

Use DNR Green Infrastructure and local data to identify connectivity gaps where plantings, conservation easements, or restoration will (1) connect habitat cores, (2) reduce stormwater/nuisance flooding, and (3) protect agricultural soils. Prioritize headwater forests and Stronghold watersheds identified by the Maryland Biological Stream Survey in targeting and project selection. Work with

land trusts and other partners to prioritize protecting these green infrastructure gaps

Policy 3.2: Preserve Scenic, Historic, and Roadside Resources

Preserve scenic, historic, and roadside landscapes as defining features of County identity and rural character.

Action 3.2.1: Preserve Scenic and Historic Roadway Corridors

Preserve, maintain, and enhance the character-defining qualities of designated scenic and historic roads.

Action 3.2.2: Preserve and Enhance Roadside Forests and Woodland Buffers

Preserve and enhance roadside forests and woodland buffers to protect viewsheds of historic roads, maintain the rural character of roadways in rural areas and growth area edges, and use urban forestry and street trees to buffer and screen new development along principal roads in town centers and villages.

Policy 3.3: Develop and Manage Greenways and Open Space Systems

Develop interconnected greenways and open space systems to enhance recreation, public access, habitat protection, water quality, and

heritage area connections, while demonstrating best practices in resource stewardship.

Action 3.3.1: Implement Greenway and Open Space Projects

Implement greenway and open space projects that link watershed resources with Southern Maryland Heritage Area sites, supporting both environmental and cultural objectives.

Action 3.3.2: Demonstrate and Promote Resource Protection Through Education

Use publicly managed lands to demonstrate natural resource protection techniques and educate residents, businesses, and students about the benefits of a healthy environment. Expand education and public awareness programs, including integration of environmental curriculum in public schools, to encourage preservation of natural, historic, and cultural resources.

Action 3.3.3: Integrate Greenways into Development Design

Require County ordinances and transportation plans to protect sensitive areas within open space parcels of major subdivisions. Ensure these open spaces contribute to a continuous network of wildlife corridors and support development of a countywide greenway and trail system. Design and locate greenway infrastructure to avoid and minimize impacts on habitat and ecological functions.

Action 3.3.4: Explore the Feasibility of an Urban Tree Program

Explore the creation of an urban tree program for Leonardtown and Lexington Park

Development Districts and for the Town Centers.

Policy 3.4: Accommodate Mineral Extraction While Minimizing Impacts

Accommodate the extraction of mineral resources while minimizing adverse impacts to water resources, habitats, and adjacent land uses, and preserving access to potential resource areas for future needs.

Action 3.4.1: Require Mineral Extraction Operations to Implement Best Management Practices

Require mineral extraction operations to implement best management practices that protect surrounding habitats, water quality, and neighboring land uses.

Action 3.4.2: Maintain Land Use Policies That Preserve Access to Mineral Resource Areas

Maintain land use policies that preserve access to mineral resource areas and prevent incompatible development, while prohibiting mineral extraction in designated habitat protection areas unsuitable for mining.

Action 3.4.3: Require Reclamation and Site Stabilization Plans for All Extraction Activities

Require reclamation and site stabilization plans for all extraction activities to ensure long-term environmental protection and viable post-mining land use.

WATER RESOURCES

GOAL 4: PROTECT AND ENHANCE WATER RESOURCES

Reduce nutrient and sediment pollution to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries through Tributary Strategies, partnerships, and enforcement of water quality standards.

Policy 4.1: Reduce Nutrient and Pollutant Loads to the Chesapeake Bay and Its Tributaries

Reduce nutrient and sediment pollution entering the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries by implementing Tributary Strategies, coordinating with State and Federal partners, and enforcing measures that ensure measurable water quality improvements.

Action 4.1.1: Implement Tributary Strategies

Continue implementing Tributary Strategy actions for the Lower Potomac and Patuxent watersheds to achieve nutrient reduction goals consistent with the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and Watershed Implementation Plans.

Action 4.1.2: Coordinate with State and Federal Partners

Work with State and Federal agencies to streamline reviews, ensure regulatory compliance, and implement projects that protect water quality and habitats, including addressing problem sewer areas near the waterfront in coordination with the Health Department.

Action 4.1.3: Track and Adapt Implementation

Monitor Tributary Strategy progress, report on milestones, and adjust actions based on State water quality and habitat data. Implement regulatory controls if voluntary measures fail to achieve nutrient reduction goals.

Policy 4.2: Protect and Sustain Groundwater and Drinking Water Supplies

Safeguard groundwater and drinking water through recharge protection, monitoring, conservation, and pollution prevention. If needed, investigate the status of the aquifers St. Mary's County draws from and note if there are any concerns regarding their ability to support future development.

Action 4.2.1: Protect Aquifers and Recharge Areas

Work with State and regional agencies to protect aquifer recharge zones, regulate land use impacts, and enforce well abandonment standards.

Action 4.2.2: Monitor Groundwater Withdrawals

Track withdrawal rates and aquifer levels; direct new wells to aquifers in ways that protect existing supply and users.

Action 4.2.3: Promote Water Conservation, Reuse, and Risk Mitigation

Expand conservation programs, reclaimed water use, effluent reuse for irrigation/industry, and residential practices such as rain barrels and cisterns. Monitor and mitigate risks such as arsenic in the Piney Point and Aquia aquifers and pollution from contaminated sites.

Action 4.2.4: Protect Surface Water and Impoundment Sites

Enforce land use policies to protect potential impoundment areas and safeguard surface waters from contamination by chemicals, pesticides, and waste.

Policy 4.3: Apply Best Practices in Development to Protect Water Quality

Ensure new development and redevelopment projects minimize disturbance, incorporate environmental site design, and comply with resource protection standards through coordinated enforcement and interagency review.

Action 4.3.1: Enforce Zoning, Permits, and Resource Protections

Apply zoning and permit requirements to minimize water quality impacts, require Best Management Practices (BMPs) to control erosion and sedimentation during construction, and coordinate with State agencies to enforce restrictions on wetlands, streams, and their buffers.

Action 4.3.2: Provide Incentives for Stewardship

Provide incentives for soil conservation, buffer planting, livestock exclusion fencing, and alternative watering systems for agriculture and forestry.

Policy 4.4: Reduce Point and Nonpoint Source Pollution

Reduce pollution from both point and nonpoint sources through comprehensive watershed management, improved wastewater and septic controls, stormwater regulation, and ongoing monitoring and adaptive management.

Action 4.4.1: Control Runoff and Monitor Watershed Pollution

Enforce stormwater, erosion, and sediment control standards and conduct watershed studies to identify pollution sources, inform the public, and hold responsible parties accountable.

Action 4.4.2: Address Pollution from Sewage and Septic Systems

Protect water resources from contamination related to wastewater treatment and septic failures.

Action 4.4.3: Coordinate Nutrient Reduction and SAV Restoration

Align County water quality programs with State Tributary Strategies and support SAV restoration to improve Bay health.

Action 4.4.4: Enforce Adaptive Management

Ensure agency oversight and use State tracking tools to adjust County strategies to meet water quality standards.

Policy 4.5: Manage Shorelines, Water-Dependent Uses, and Public Access

Manage shorelines, water-dependent uses, and public access in a manner that balances habitat protection, water quality, recreation, and commercial needs.

Action 4.5.1: Establish Shoreline Work Guidelines

Require shoreline permits to give equal weight to near-shore habitat protection, natural resources, and property protection.

Action 4.5.2: Update Standards for Marinas and Water-Dependent Facilities

Update zoning and performance standards for marinas and water-dependent facilities to minimize cumulative impacts while supporting viable marina activities. Allow Buffer Management Overlay for existing marina sites to facilitate improvements.

Action 4.5.3: Expand Public Water Access

Acquire lands to provide public access to the Patuxent River and other waterfront areas and provide recreational water-dependent facilities that are environmentally sustainable.



6

Transportation Element

In This Section

Charting a Connected Tomorrow

Biking, Walking, Hiking

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Charting a Connected Tomorrow

The transportation system of St. Mary's County is the lifeblood of its communities, connecting residents to jobs, services, recreation, and beyond. As St. Mary's County looks towards 2050, the overarching vision for its transportation element is to foster a safe, efficient, accessible, fair, and sustainable network that supports the county's unique character – balancing its rich agricultural and maritime history with present-day industry and future growth. This involves not only maintaining and improving existing infrastructure but also embracing innovative solutions and expanding multimodal options to meet the evolving needs of its diverse population. This document provides an overview of the key themes and priorities identified through extensive community engagement and data analysis, serving as a foundational piece for the St. Mary's 2050 Comprehensive Plan's Transportation Element.

The county's commitment to thoughtful growth and preservation of its rural character is intrinsically linked to its transportation strategy. An effective transportation plan must address the localized challenges that accompany growth, particularly in areas identified for development, while simultaneously ensuring accessibility and safety across the entire county, including its rural landscapes. The Comprehensive Plan aims to establish a cohesive, countywide vision for land use and an actionable strategy to achieve it, with transportation playing a pivotal role in this endeavor.

The Current Transportation Landscape: A Snapshot

St. Mary's County's transportation network is a blend of local roads, minor collectors, and principal arterials, with major north-south and east-west connectors facilitating movement throughout the county. The Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW&T) primarily manages this road network, in coordination with the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Calvert-St. Mary's Metropolitan Planning Organization (C-SMMPO), and

the Department of Land Use and Growth Management (LUGM).

Public transit services are provided by the St. Mary's Transit System (STS), which operates nine routes Monday through Friday, with some Saturday service and two Sunday routes. These services also include Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) deviations, and major trip generators such as multifamily housing, medical facilities, educational institutions, major employers, and shopping areas in route planning. However, transit dependency is expanding beyond current service routes,

particularly towards the northwestern parts of the county.

For active transportation, sidewalks exist along some major road corridors, but they frequently lack full connectivity, especially in Lexington Park and adjacent areas. Bicycle routes are expanding with plans to connect full routes.

Commuting patterns in St. Mary's County reveal a significant interplay between where residents live and work.

Approximately 44% of people working in St. Mary's County live outside the county, while 56% of residents living in St. Mary's County work outside the county.

Conversely, 56% of those working in St. Mary's County also reside within it. This highlights the importance of both internal and external connectivity for the county's workforce.

Community Concerns and Priorities: Voices from Engagement

Community engagement insights are crucial for shaping a transportation element that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of St. Mary's County residents and community members.

Traffic Congestion and Road Infrastructure

A prominent concern among community members and residents is increased traffic, particularly in areas like Lexington Park and along Three Notch Road. The current functionality of various

intersections is a point of contention, with reports of dangerous intersections, frequent accidents, and high congestion along key corridors such as Route 235, Route 5, and Great Mills Road. Specific intersections, including Great Mills & Route 5, Route 242 & Route 5, and Route 234 & Route 5, are noted for significant congestion, especially during school commute times. Issues like poorly managed light cycles and inadequate turning lanes seem to exacerbate afternoon traffic problems.

Community feedback consistently calls for improved traffic management and road infrastructure, including requests for additional vehicle lanes and new bridges before permitting further growth, and a focus on road maintenance in both rural and urban areas. Projects like the FDR Boulevard, aimed at alleviating congestion on MD 235, are a step in the right direction.

Public Transportation Access and Expansion

There is a clear appreciation for existing public transportation, coupled with a strong desire for improved and expanded services offering greater access. Much of the community supports improving existing bus routes with more frequent service and adding new routes to unserved areas within the county. A significant portion also desired new routes to areas outside the county, such as the Washington, D.C. area.

The community emphasized the need to modernize and update the STS bus system, including supporting paratransit services. There is also interest in emerging forms of public transportation like microtransit, an on-demand and flexible-route form of public transportation. There are concerns about a perceived lack of public transit access to key areas, including St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM), and the need for shuttle services for NAS Pax River base commuters to reduce congestion. Long-term future investments in public transportation, especially for the county's aging population, are a concern. There is a strong link between public transit and access to essential services.

Active Transportation: Bicycling and Pedestrian Infrastructure

The community desires safe bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Building upon the success of the Three Notch Trail, there continues to be a desire to see more trails in rural areas. Specific needs include adding shoulders to Medleys Neck Road for walking and biking, improving pedestrian safety, and connecting and expanding sidewalks, especially in Lexington Park and along major corridors. Leonardtown, California, and Lexington Park were identified as priority areas for new or enhanced bike/pedestrian trails.

Safety and Regulation

Traffic and vehicle safety is a significant concern, with a high number of crashes reported, particularly on or near Three Notch Road. The need to address safety issues is a key priority. Additionally, there is interest in evaluating parking requirements to ensure flexibility and appropriateness.

Interdependencies and Integrated Planning

The various aspects of transportation are not isolated; they form a complex web that interacts with land use, economic development, public health, and environmental sustainability. This "connective tissue" is vital for crafting a comprehensive and effective transportation element.

Transportation and Land Use

The close relationship between transportation and land use is evident in several themes, highlighting the need for intentional growth management. Concerns about increased traffic directly linked to new development underscore the need for coordination between transportation investments and locations supported for new development. The desire for mixed-use developments and walkable communities underscores a preference for land use patterns that reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles and promote active transportation. Similarly, the support for

clustering services in rural areas at town centers/crossroads, potentially supported by package plants for water and sewer, indirectly supports more localized travel patterns and potentially reduces longer commutes. The discussion around acceptable levels of service (LOS) in town centers versus development districts further emphasizes the need for integrated planning that considers both transportation capacity and desired development character.

Transportation and Economic Development

Efficient transportation is critical for economic vitality. The continued build-out and support for the county airport and related technology park points to the role of transportation infrastructure in supporting key industries. The number of residents commuting into and out of the county for work highlights the importance of regional transportation connections and the potential for improved public transit to support this workforce mobility. Addressing traffic congestion also contributes to economic efficiency by reducing commute times and improving goods movement.

Transportation and Public Health

The demand for expanded public transportation options, particularly to unserved areas and the aging population, demonstrates the role of transportation in promoting access to essential services. Improving pedestrian and bicycle

infrastructure not only offers recreational opportunities but also encourages physical activity, contributing to public health outcomes. The need to ensure feasible safety for Amish and Mennonite communities traveling via horse and buggy is another example of addressing the specific transportation needs of diverse populations within the county.

Transportation and Environmental Sustainability and Resilience

Promoting active transportation and expanding public transit can contribute to environmental goals by reducing vehicle pollution and emissions. Furthermore, improved road maintenance and infrastructure can implicitly address issues related to stormwater runoff and its impact on waterways. While not explicitly detailed in the transportation section, the broader discussions about social vulnerability and resiliency in the face of natural hazards suggest that transportation infrastructure planning must consider the impacts of climate change, such as nuisance flooding affecting roadways. Ensuring resilient transportation networks is also crucial for emergency response and maintaining connectivity during adverse events.

Key Themes for the Transportation Element

Enhancing Multimodal Connectivity

Prioritizing the expansion and integration of various transportation modes, including improved public transit, a comprehensive network of bicycle and pedestrian trails, and safe pedestrian infrastructure, to offer viable alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle travel.

Addressing Traffic Congestion and Safety

Implementing strategies to alleviate traffic congestion in key corridors and intersections, improving road infrastructure, and enhancing traffic management systems. A strong emphasis will be placed on improving traffic and vehicle safety through targeted interventions and community education campaigns.

Promoting Equitable Access

Ensuring that all residents, regardless of age, income, or location, have equitable access to transportation options that connect them to jobs, education, healthcare, and other essential services. This includes expanding public transit to unserved areas and supporting the transportation needs of vulnerable populations.

Integrating Transportation and Land Use

Developing transportation solutions that are in harmony with planned land use patterns, supporting smart growth principles, encouraging mixed-use and walkable communities, and minimizing the adverse transportation impacts of new development. This involves a collaborative approach between transportation planners and land use decision-makers.

Investing in Resilient and Sustainable Infrastructure

Planning for transportation infrastructure that is resilient to the impacts of climate change and supports environmental sustainability. This includes considering the long-term viability of infrastructure projects in the face of environmental challenges and promoting modes that reduce emissions.

Supporting Regional Connectivity

Recognizing St. Mary's County's position within a broader regional context, and advocating for and participating in regional transportation planning efforts, including potential future connections to neighboring counties and the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, and considering the needs of commuters to and from the county.

A Path Forward

The future of St. Mary's County's transportation system relies on a proactive and integrated approach that reflects the community's values and addresses its challenges. By focusing on enhancing multimodal connectivity, mitigating congestion, ensuring equitable access, aligning with land use, building resilient infrastructure, and fostering regional connections, the county can continue charting a connected, sustainable, and prosperous tomorrow for all residents.

Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

BIKING, WALKING, HIKING

GOAL 1: ENSURE A SAFE AND COMPLETE PEDESTRIAN NETWORK

Develop and maintain a continuous and accessible system of sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian pathways that connects the community and ensures safety for all residents.

Policy 1.1: Apply Excellent Community Design Principles for Pedestrian Safety

Apply excellent community design principles to all new construction and redevelopment to create safe, accessible, and integrated environments for pedestrians.

Policy 1.2: Encourage Sidewalks for New Development

Encourage the inclusion of sidewalks as part of all new residential (zoned at less than 1-acre lots) and commercial developments to ensure consistent pedestrian access.

Policy 1.3: Systematically Fill Gaps in Existing Sidewalk Network

Systematically evaluate and identify locations where new sidewalk connections are needed to fill gaps in the existing network.

Policy 1.4: Require Adequate, Well-Marked Crosswalks and Sidewalks

Require adequate, well-marked crosswalks and sidewalks in all relevant development and redevelopment projects.

Action 1.4.1: Maintain a Program for Sidewalk Repair and Obstruction Removal

Maintain a program for sidewalk repair and obstruction removal while continuing to improve American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compatibility and mobility access. Continue to make ADA improvements when asphalt overlays are scheduled.

Policy 1.5: Collaborate with Leonardtown on a Countywide Pedestrian and Bikeways Master Plan

Work with Leonardtown to create a Countywide Pedestrian and Bikeways Master Plan that aligns the Town's and the County's investments with regional goals

GOAL 2: PROMOTE BICYCLING AS A VIABLE TRANSPORTATION MODE IN THE GROWTH AREAS

Establish a comprehensive bicycle network supported by essential amenities and public awareness, making cycling a safe, convenient, and attractive option for transportation and recreation.

Policy 2.1: Provide End-of-Trip Support to Cyclists

Provide end-of-trip support for cyclists by ensuring necessary facilities are available at their destinations.

Policy 2.2: Establish Bicycling as a Safe Mode of Transportation

Enhance public awareness to establish bicycling as a recognized and safe mode of transportation.

Policy 2.3: Apply Community Design Principles to Create Safe Environments for Bicyclists and Pedestrians

Apply excellent community design principles to all new construction and redevelopment to create safe, accessible, and integrated environments for bicyclists.

Action 2.3.1: Adopt Official Design Standards for Bicycle Facilities

Adopt official design standards for bicycle facilities and multi-use trails and integrate them into the County's Road Ordinance and Design Manuals.

Action 2.3.2: Provide Secure and Convenient Bicycle Parking and Storage at Key Locations

Provide secure and convenient bicycle parking and storage at all key destinations, including schools, recreation facilities, parks, and public offices.

Action 2.3.3: Work with St. Mary's Transit System to Equip All Transit Vehicles with Bicycle Accommodations

Work with St. Mary's Transit System to continue to equip all transit vehicles with bicycle accommodations to support multimodal travel.

GOAL 3: ACHIEVE FULL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM CONNECTIVITY

Create a fully integrated transportation system where developments, travel modes, and key destinations are seamlessly linked, reducing travel distances and improving traffic flow.

Policy 3.1: Ensure Site Design Enhances the Transportation Network

Ensure that all site design, including design of County-owned grounds and facilities, maximizes the attractiveness and connectivity of the transportation network.

Action 3.1.1: Incorporate Inter-Parcel Connections

New development should incorporate inter-parcel connections to minimize traffic impacts along commercial corridors

Policy 3.2: Encourage New Development to Provide Safe Routes, Including Alternative Routes Connecting to Adjacent Neighborhoods, School, and Activity Centers, Where Feasible

Encourage new developments to provide safe, alternative access routes connecting to adjacent neighborhoods, schools, and activity centers.

Policy 3.3: Coordinate with Adjacent Counties to Maintain Consistent Transportation Facilities

Coordinate with adjacent counties to maintain the continuity and consistency of transportation facilities across borders.

Action 3.3.1: Encourage Private and Public Roads that Slow Traffic Speeds

Encourage private and public roads that slow traffic speeds to reinforce pedestrian safety and access, by using narrower rights of way, speed humps, traffic circles and similar features, as appropriate for the road type.



GOAL 4: SECURE LONG-RANGE FUNDING AND MULTI-MODAL SYSTEM VIABILITY

Ensure the long-term success of the multi-modal network through strategic financial planning, support for long-range bicycle and pedestrian projects, preservation of future transit corridors, and expansion of public transportation.

Policy 4.1: Formally Protect the Old Railroad Right-of-Way for Future Light Rail Use

Formally protect the old railroad right-of-way for a minimum of 50 years to support potential future light rail or rapid transit development.

Action 4.1.1: Encourage Use of Existing Crossings of the Old Railroad Right-of-Way

Encourage the use of existing right-of-way crossings on the old railroad for new development, limiting new crossings where feasible.

Policy 4.2: Commit to Providing Expanded Pedestrian and Bicycle Opportunities

Commit to providing expanded pedestrian and bicycle opportunities for both recreation and transportation.

Action 4.2.1: Leverage a Diverse Portfolio of Funding Sources

Leverage a diverse portfolio of funding sources, including County bonds, impact fees, State POS funds, and federal programs, for trail system development.

Policy 4.3: Identify Future Congestion Points and Determine Transit Improvements

Identify future congestion points and determine the transit improvements required to ensure efficient travel for all modes.

GOAL 5: INTEGRATE TRAILS AND PATHWAYS INTO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Weave a network of recreational and transportation trails into the fabric of the community by incorporating them into all new land use and development projects.

Policy 5.1: Ensure New Developments Contribute to Bicycle and Pedestrian Opportunities

Ensure new developments contribute to expanded pedestrian and bicycle opportunities.

Policy 5.2: Consider a Wide Range of Land Uses as Key Nodes Within a Trail Network

Consider a wide range of land uses—such as parks, schools, and historical points of interest—as key nodes and destinations within the trail network.

Action 5.2.1: Incorporate Trails into the Development of New Parks and Community Projects

Incorporate trails into the development of all new parks and community projects, adhering to applicable design standards.

Action 5.2.2: Require Developers to Either Construct or Pay a Fee-in-Lieu to Support the Three Notch Trail

Require developers to either construct portions of the Three Notch Trail or pay a fee-in-lieu to support its completion.

Action 5.2.3: Consider Connections to Community Points of Interest in Route Planning

When planning routes, consider connections to parks, park-and-ride lots, water access areas, schools, and other community points of interest.

Policy 5.3: Partner with SMECO to Explore Using Powerline Easements for Trails

Work with the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative (SMECO) to examine opportunities to turn powerline easements into trails.

ROADS

GOAL 6: CONCENTRATE DEVELOPMENT TO PRESERVE REGIONAL HIGHWAY CAPACITY

Strategically guide new development into designated Growth Areas, promoting well-connected local road networks while preserving the capacity and function of state highways for regional and through traffic.

Policy 6.1: Concentrate New Development in Designated Growth Areas

Concentrate the majority of new residential and commercial growth in development districts, town centers, and village centers to support functioning of regional highway capacity.

Policy 6.2: Maintain Scenic Corridors

Maintain scenic corridors along the Religious Freedom Byway (including MD 234 and MD 5 near and south of Leonardtown) and other scenic corridors by limiting signage and clear-cutting for development.

Policy 6.3: Continue Planning for Critical Corridors

Continue planning for critical corridors, including Three Notch Road and FDR Boulevard.

Action 6.3.1: Complete FDR Boulevard planning study with the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Promote the completion of the FDR Boulevard extension through completion of the study to provide justification for funding.

Action 6.3.2: Promote Well-Connected Roadway Networks to Support Planned Growth

Promote the building of well-connected local roadway networks to support planned growth within the Development Districts.

Action 6.3.3: Work with Maryland State Highway Administration to Manage State Road Access Points for Development

Work with the Maryland State Highway Administration to manage state road access points for existing and planned development.

Action 6.3.4: Prepare and Implement Specific Highway Access Policies for Key Corridors

Prepare and implement specific highway access policies for key corridors like Three Notch Road (MD 5/235) in Charlotte Hall, New Market, Mechanicsville, and Hollywood.

Action 6.3.5: Commission a Comprehensive Corridor and Land-Use Study for Three Notch Road and FDR Boulevard

Work with the MPO to complete a comprehensive corridor and land-use study

for completion of the Three Notch Road and FDR Boulevard corridors to address current and future transportation needs within the Lexington Park Development District.



GOAL 7: CREATE A SAFE, EFFICIENT, AND INTEGRATED ROADWAY SYSTEM

Develop and maintain a roadway system that is safe, efficient, and economical for all modes of transportation, supporting community revitalization, economic development, and environmental stewardship.

Policy 7.1: Ensure a Safe and Efficient Roadway System

Ensure the roadway system is integrated, safe, and efficient for all users, improving traffic management and road infrastructure. Implement age-friendly road design features for older drivers, such as protected left turn signals with dedicated turn lanes, improved street lighting at intersections, larger road signs with clearer fonts, slower speed limits, and rumble strips.

Policy 7.2: Classify County Roadways Based on Vehicular Conditions

Classify County roadways based on vehicular volume, speed, and geometric conditions to guide planning. Standardize classification using state naming conventions.

Policy 7.3: Provide Safe and Efficient Roads that Support Community Goals

Provide safe and efficient roads that actively support community revitalization,

economic development, and environmental goals.

Action 7.3.1: Identify Future Congestion and Determine Roadway Improvements

Identify locations that will experience future congestion and determine the roadway improvements needed to ensure efficient travel.

Action 7.3.2: Develop and Implement Transportation Plans and Standards that Support Community Goals

Develop and implement transportation plans and standards that support resource protection, community character, and economic development.

Action 7.3.3: Coordinate New Roadway Development with Leonardtown

For new roads in and near Leonardtown, coordinate with Leonardtown and with state agencies to ensure integration and consistency.

GOAL 8: ENHANCE ROADWAY SAFETY FOR ALL USERS AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Proactively improve roadway safety by reducing conflict locations and integrating the unique cultural needs of all communities, including the Amish and Mennonite populations.

Policy 8.1: Formally Integrate Amish and Mennonite Communities into Transportation Planning

Formally integrate the unique agriculture and culture of the Amish and Mennonite communities into transportation planning.

Policy 8.2: Ensure Adequate Safety for Travelers with an Appropriate Level of Access

Ensure adequate capacity and safety for the entire traveling public with an appropriate level of access.

Policy 8.3: Prioritize Providing a Safe and Efficient Roadway System

Prioritize providing a safe and efficient roadway system as a core principle of transportation planning.

Action 8.3.1: Initiate Improvements to Enhance Safety and Reduce Conflict Locations

Initiate improvements to enhance safety and reduce conflict locations, especially on roadways with high traffic volumes and insufficient passing opportunities.

Action 8.3.2: Identify and Evaluate Conflicts Between Horse-and-Buggy Traffic and Motorized Vehicles

Identify and evaluate conflicts between horse-and-buggy traffic and motorized vehicles by analyzing County roadways based on traffic volume.

Action 8.3.3: Develop a List of Recommended Upgrades and Downgrades in the Road Classification System

Develop a list of recommended upgrades and downgrades in the road classification system to ensure safety needs are met.

GOAL 9: MANAGE ROADWAY ACCESS TO IMPROVE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY

Improve the safety and efficiency of major roads by minimizing access points and requiring shared access solutions in new and existing developments.

Policy 9.1: Provide an Integrated and Efficient Roadway System

Provide an integrated and efficient roadway system by managing how properties connect to it.

Action 9.1.1: Require Joint-Use Access Driveways and Driveway Consolidation

Require joint-use access driveways and driveway consolidation for contiguous

properties to reduce the number of ingress and egress points.

Action 9.1.2: Minimize Access Points to Major Roads

Minimize the number of outlets (access points) to major roads.

Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

GOAL 10: PROMOTE RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Build and maintain a transportation system that is resilient to environmental risks and actively supports the protection of natural resources and community character.

Policy 10.1: Reduce Long-Term Risks from the Effects of Natural Hazards

Reduce long-term risks to people and their property from the effects of natural hazards like flooding.

Policy 10.2: Ensure the Roadway System Supports Community Revitalization and Environmental Stewardship

Ensure that the roadway system supports and promotes community revitalization while not compromising environmental stewardship goals.

Policy 10.3: Direct Growth Away from Sensitive Resource Areas

Direct growth away from sensitive resource areas to promote the protection of agriculture and forestry.

Action 10.3.1: Address Inadequate Storm Conveyance Systems and Bridge Structures

Address existing storm conveyance systems and bridge structures that are inadequate to handle runoff and lead to localized flooding.

Action 10.3.2: Develop Transportation Plans that Support Resource Protection and Corridor Preservation

Develop and implement transportation plans and standards that explicitly support resource protection and corridor preservation.

Action 10.3.3: Utilize Mitigation Efforts to Minimize Damage to Properties

Minimize damage to properties that experience repetitive loss from natural events through proactive mitigation efforts.

TRANSIT

GOAL 11: ACHIEVE HIGH-PERFORMING, FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE TRANSIT OPERATIONS

Ensure the county's transit system operates at or above state performance standards while maintaining a financially sound structure through continuous evaluation and strategic management of fares and funding.

Policy 11.1: Improve Mobility and Public Transportation Programs

Improve mobility and public transportation programs and service for the citizens of St. Mary's County.

Policy 11.2: Commit to Meeting or Exceeding Transit System Performance Standards

Commit to meeting or exceeding the performance standards established for all transit systems in the State of Maryland.

Policy 11.3: Maintain a System of Continuous Needs Assessment

Maintain a system of continuous needs assessment and evaluation to guide system improvements and funding strategies.

Action 11.3.1: Meet or Exceed Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) Performance Standards

Meet or exceed the MTA performance standards developed for all transit systems in the State of Maryland.

Action 11.3.2: Limit General Fund Subsidy Through Ridership Fare Structures and Alternative Funding Sources

Develop ridership and fare structures and alternative funding sources that limit the level of general fund subsidy required for operations.

Action 11.3.3: Maintain a Needs Assessment and Evaluation of Funding Structures

Maintain a needs assessment and an evaluation of options, fare structure, and supplemental funding sources for system improvement.

GOAL 12: EXPAND TRANSIT SERVICES TO MEET GROWING REGIONAL DEMAND

Proactively expand transit routes and service opportunities to meet the increasing demand for travel both within and beyond St. Mary's County, fostered by strong regional cooperation.

Policy 12.1: Meet Transit Demand by Expanding Routes and Service

Meet the rapidly growing transit demand to and from St. Mary's County by expanding routes and service opportunities.

Action 12.1.1: Strategically Expand Transit Services to Reach Regional and Metropolitan Destinations

In coordination with regional partners, strategically expand routes and service opportunities to accommodate the county's growing transit demand, connecting with regional and metropolitan destinations and improving public transit reach.

Policy 12.2: Encourage Transit Use for Broader Community Benefits

Encourage the use of transit to achieve broader community benefits, such as reduced emissions and greater economic opportunity.

Policy 12.3: Promote and Advocate for a Connected Public Transit System

Promote and advocate for a connected public transit system through local and regional cooperation and coordination.

Action 12.3.1: Promote Public Transit Systems through Local and Regional Collaboration

Promote and advocate for public transit systems and connections through collaboration with local and regional partners.

Action 12.3.2: Actively Encourage Transit Use for Persons Without Motor Vehicles

Actively encourage the use of transit to minimize trips, reduce emissions, and increase economic opportunities for persons without motor vehicles.

GOAL 13: ENSURE TRANSPORTATION ACCESS FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Create a seamless and accessible transportation system that addresses service deficits for targeted and vulnerable populations, enhancing their quality of life and connection to human services.

Policy 13.1: Foster a Seamless Delivery System of Care for Human Services that Enhances Quality of Life

Foster a seamless delivery system of care for human services that enhances citizens' quality of life and promotes cohesive communities.

Policy 13.2: Support Increased Public Transportation Options for Targeted Populations

Support and promote increased public transportation options that directly address service deficits for targeted populations.

Policy 13.3: Prioritize Securing Funding to Improve Service Quality for the County's Vulnerable Populations

Prioritize securing funding to improve service quality and access for the county's vulnerable populations.

Action 13.3.1: Seek Funding to Improve Transit Access to Vulnerable Communities

Seek funding specifically to improve transportation for vulnerable populations and to enhance the quality and accessibility of service.

Action 13.3.2: Identify the Evolving Needs of Public Ridership

Identify the evolving needs of public ridership, especially among targeted groups, through dedicated outreach and education programs to expand ridership.

Action 13.3.3: Support and Promote Public Transportation Options to Address Deficits in Targeted Populations

Support and promote increased public transportation options that are designed to address deficits for targeted populations.

GOAL 14: MAINTAIN AND BUILD UPON THE EFFECTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE TRANSIT MANAGEMENT

Strengthen the administration and planning of the county's transit services by continuing to create dedicated management roles, implementing expert recommendations, and fostering stakeholder collaboration.

Policy 14.1: Ensure Transportation Services are Professionally Managed and Planned

Foster a seamless and cohesive community by ensuring transportation services are professionally managed and planned.

Policy 14.2: Encourage the Creation of a Dedicated Management Structure for Public Transportation Services

Encourage the creation of a dedicated management structure to oversee mobile and public transportation services.

GOAL 15: INCREASE RIDERSHIP THROUGH STRATEGIC OUTREACH AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Grow public transit ridership by better understanding rider needs, actively promoting the benefits of transit, and continuously improving the quality and relevance of the service.

Policy 15.1: Improve the Overall Quality and Availability of Public Transportation Programs

Improve the overall quality and availability of public transportation programs and service to all citizens.

Policy 15.2: Meet Growing and Evolving Transit Demand by Adapting Services Based on Rider Feedback

Meet growing and evolving transit demand by strategically expanding routes

and adapting services based on performance and rider feedback.

Policy 15.3: Encourage Widespread Use of Transit as a Primary Mode of Travel

Encourage widespread use of transit as a primary means of travel to achieve community-wide goals.

Action 15.3.1: Promote Transit Benefits to Attract New Riders

Promote the benefits of using transit, such as minimizing trips and increasing economic opportunity, to attract new riders.

WATER ACCESS

GOAL 16: LEVERAGE POTENTIAL PASSENGER FERRY TO DRIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TOURISM

Establish St. Mary's County as a key destination on the Chesapeake Bay by using a new passenger ferry service to attract tourists, support local businesses, and generate sustainable economic activity.

Policy 16.1: Prioritize the Ferry Service as an Economic Development and Tourism Strategy

Prioritize the ferry service as a central component of the county's tourism and economic development strategy.

Policy 16.2: Encourage the Development of New and Existing Businesses Catering to Ferry Passengers

Encourage the development of new and existing businesses that cater to ferry passengers, such as recreational opportunities, restaurants, retail shops, and lodging.

Policy 16.3: Ensure Ferry Landing Sites are Integrated with Local Business Districts and Cultural Attractions

Ensure that ferry landing sites are integrated with local business districts and cultural attractions to maximize visitor spending in the community.

Action 16.3.1: Develop Targeted Marketing Campaigns Bundling Transportation with Local Accommodations

Develop targeted marketing campaigns promoting "ferry and stay" packages that bundle transportation with local accommodations, dining, and attractions.

Action 16.3.2: Partner with the St. Mary's County Chamber of Commerce and Local Businesses to Create a Business Certification Program

Partner with the St. Mary's County Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to create a "Ferry Friendly" business certification program.

Action 16.3.3: Install Effective Wayfinding to Direct Ferry Passengers to Key Sites

Install clear and attractive wayfinding signage directing ferry passengers from landing sites to key points of interest, including historic St. Mary's City and Leonardtown.

GOAL 17: FOSTER REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY THROUGH INTER-COUNTY COLLABORATION

Strengthen regional partnerships and enhance mobility across the Chesapeake Bay by actively participating in the five-county consortium and ensuring the successful integration of St. Mary's County into a bay-wide ferry network.

Policy 17.1: Commit to Being an Active Partner in the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Consortium

Commit to being an active and collaborative partner within the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Consortium.

Policy 17.2: Align the County's Transportation and Land Use Planning with the Regional Ferry System

Align the county's transportation and land-use planning with the operational needs and schedules of the regional ferry system.

Policy 17.3: Support the Pursuit of Joint Funding and Shared Operational Models

Support the pursuit of joint funding and shared operational models to ensure the long-term success of the multi-county initiative.

Action 17.3.1: Appoint a Dedicated County Representative as a Primary Liaison to the Ferry Consortium

Appoint a dedicated county representative to serve as the primary liaison to the ferry consortium and report progress to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County.

Action 17.3.2: Work with Partners to Develop a Unified Ferry Network Branding and Ticketing System

Work with consortium partners to develop a unified branding and ticketing system for the entire ferry network.

Action 17.3.3: Participate in Joint Applications for Federal and State Transportation Grants

Participate in joint applications for federal and state transportation grants to fund vessel acquisition, infrastructure, and operational costs.

GOAL 18: PROMOTE THE SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE IMPLEMENTATION OF FERRY SERVICE

Develop the necessary infrastructure, secure stable funding, and establish a viable operational plan to launch and maintain a reliable and efficient passenger ferry service in St. Mary's County.

Policy 18.1: Pursue a Diversified Funding Strategy

Pursue a diversified funding strategy that combines public grants with private investment to cover both capital and operational costs.

Policy 18.2: Ensure Environmentally Sustainable Design of Ferry Landing Infrastructure

Ensure that the design and construction of ferry landing infrastructure are environmentally sustainable and resilient.

Policy 18.3: Commit to Selecting a Qualified Ferry Operator

Commit to selecting a qualified and experienced ferry operator through a transparent and competitive process.

Action 18.3.1: Conduct Detailed Studies for Proposed Ferry Landings

Conduct detailed site-planning and engineering studies for the proposed ferry landings in St. Mary's City and/or Leonardtown.

Action 18.3.2: Create a Capital Improvement Plan

Create a capital improvement plan that outlines the phased development of necessary infrastructure, including piers, ramps, restrooms, and parking.

Action 18.3.3: Issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Professional Ferry Operator

Issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify and contract with a professional ferry operator for the St. Mary's County routes.

NAS PAX AND ST. MARY'S COUNTY REGIONAL AIRPORT

GOAL 19: PROTECT AIRPORT NAVIGATIONAL SAFETY AND AIRSPACE INTEGRITY

Ensure the operational safety and integrity of St. Mary's County Regional Airport by preventing the construction of physical or non-physical obstructions that could interfere with flight paths and approach minimums.

Policy 19.1: Mandate that Tall Structures Do Not Impede on Airport Approach Minimums

Mandate that the design and construction of all towers and tall structures do not impede or adversely affect airport approach minimums.

Action 19.1.1: Ensure the Permitting Process Explicitly Reviews for Obstructions

Ensure that the permitting process for construction activities includes reviews and prevents the creation of obstructions or incompatibilities.



GOAL 20: PROMOTE COMPATIBLE LAND USE THROUGH EFFECTIVE AIRPORT ZONING

Align all county zoning and permitting activities with established Airport Enviros to ensure that adjacent land uses are compatible with airport operations and do not create safety or noise conflicts.

Policy 20.1: Continue to Use Airport Enviros as the Primary Zoning and Permitting Tool for Construction Near the Airport

Continue to use Airport Enviros as the primary tool for all zoning and permitting of construction activities in the airport's vicinity.

Policy 20.2: Utilize Zoning to Support Non-Encroachment on Airport

Support non-encroachment on airport through the strict implementation of zoning restrictions.

Action 20.2.1: Utilize the Airport Enviros to Guide Zoning and Permitting

Utilize the established Airport Enviros to guide zoning and permitting for construction, preventing incompatible development.

Action 20.2.2: Continue to Support Funding Allocations for the Airport's Expansion

Continue to support funding allocations for the airport's expansion, which reinforces its role as a key factor in regional land use planning.

GOAL 21: STRENGTHEN THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH PATUXENT RIVER NAVAL AIR STATION

Foster a strong, cooperative relationship with the Patuxent River Naval Air Station through coordinated airspace management, aligned zoning policies, and support for mutual economic interests.

Policy 21.1: Commit to a Cooperative Framework for Managing Shared Airspace

Commit to a formal, cooperative framework for managing shared and restricted airspace with the Naval Air Station.

Policy 21.2: Support Non-Encroachment Zoning Policies

Support non-encroachment zoning policies that are aligned with the operational needs of the Naval Air Station and Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) decisions.

Action 21.2.1: Review and Evaluate AICUZ Recommendations for Adoption

Implement and enforce AICUZ and other zoning restrictions to protect airport approach paths, prevent encroachment on military operations, and ensure compatible land use.

Action 21.2.2: Revisit the Current Letter of Authorization (LoA)

Revisit and, if necessary, update the current Letter of Authorization (LoA) between the County and the Naval Air Station regarding aircraft operations in Restricted Airspace.



GOAL 22: DRIVE REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AIRPORT GROWTH

Leverage the St. Mary's County Regional Airport as a primary driver of economic growth by encouraging supportive industries and investing in its continued expansion and modernization.

Policy 22.1: Encourage Regional Economic Activities that Support and Are Supported by the Airport

Actively encourage regional economic activities that support and are supported by the airport, including tourism, industrial development, and technology.

Policy 22.2: Promote the Continued Expansion of the Airport

Promote the continued expansion of the airport as a Category II (large) general aviation facility to attract new business and investment.

Policy 22.3: Ensure Zoning and Land Use Policies Protect the Airport's Growth Potential

Ensure zoning and land use policies protect the airport's growth potential and its role as a key economic asset.

Action 22.3.1: Market the Airport's Capabilities

Market the airport's capabilities to attract industrial developments and tourism that benefit from aviation access.

Action 22.3.2: Protect the Airport's Operational Capacity

Protect the airport's operational capacity by ensuring that nearby construction does not impede flight approaches, thus safeguarding its economic function.



GOAL 23: SECURE LONG-TERM AIRPORT VIABILITY THROUGH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND FUNDING

Ensure the long-term operational and financial health of the St. Mary's County Regional Airport by consistently seeking federal funding and implementing capital improvement projects.

Policy 23.1: Commit to the Long-Term Vision of the Airport

Commit to the long-term vision of the airport as a Category II (large) general aviation facility.

Policy 23.2: Prioritize Securing Government Funding for Improvements

Prioritize securing federal and state funding to support capital improvements, expansion, and maintenance.

Action 23.2.1: Continue to Support and Apply for the Federal Airport Capital Improvement Program (ACIP)

Continue to actively support and apply for the Federal Airport Capital Improvement Program (ACIP) and its associated funding allocations.

Action 23.2.2: Plan for Continued Airport Expansion

Plan for the continued expansion of the airport as a Category II general aviation facility.

Action 23.2.3: Implement Projects Funded by ACIP

Implement projects funded by ACIP and other sources to maintain and upgrade airport infrastructure.

7

Public Facilities and Infrastructure Element

In This Section

Building Blocks of a Thriving Community

Water, Wastewater and Stormwater to Support Growth

Adequate Public Facilities and Infrastructure Investment

Broadband and Electrical Utilities

Libraries and Government Facilities

Recreation and Parks

Schools



Building Blocks of a Thriving Community

Public facilities and infrastructure are the essential building blocks of a thriving community. They are the systems and services—from clean water and reliable sewer service to schools, parks, and public safety—that determine the quality of life, shape growth, protect public health, and ensure economic competitiveness. For St. Mary's County, a jurisdiction that prides itself on its rural character and waterfront heritage while accommodating strategic growth, the planning and provision of these foundational elements are critically important.

As the county charts its course to 2050, this Public Facilities and Infrastructure Element will establish a vision and an actionable strategy for investing in, maintaining, and expanding these vital systems. It recognizes that infrastructure is not merely a technical concern but the connective tissue that links land use, environmental stewardship, economic development, and access to services. Based on extensive data analysis and community feedback, this element seeks to create a framework for proactive, resilient, and equitable infrastructure planning that supports the county's long-term goals and ensures that St. Mary's remains a premier place to live, work, and visit for generations to come.

Existing Conditions: A System Overview

The framework for the county's future is built upon its existing network of facilities and infrastructure, managed by a combination of county, municipal, state, and private entities.

Water & Wastewater

The St. Mary's County Metropolitan Commission (MetCom) is the primary public water and sewer provider outside of Leonardtown, operating seven wastewater treatment plants and 28 water systems that draw from the Aquia, Piney Point, and Upper Patapsco aquifers. The Town of Leonardtown operates its

own municipal system and has agreements with MetCom for additional capacity. Beyond these centralized systems, the county has numerous private and community systems, including small package plants, and over 26,000 onsite septic systems, which are prevalent in rural preservation areas.

Stormwater Management

The county operates under a state-mandated Phase II MS4 permit to manage stormwater runoff through a system of ditches, culverts, and over 1,400 structural best management practices. Several watersheds, including the St. Mary's River and Breton Bay, are documented as having impairments for

nutrients and sediment. The county is evaluating a stormwater utility to address legacy neighborhoods lacking controls.

Public Safety

Fire services are provided by volunteer firefighters, while emergency medical services are primarily volunteer-based but supplemented with paid professionals. Law enforcement includes the County Sheriff's Office and the Maryland State Police. The Sheriff's Office currently operates a headquarters and three district stations. They are pursuing Capital Improvement Projects for a new headquarters and support services building.

Broadband

Broadband is another term for high-speed internet access, initially used to differentiate services like DSL and cable internet from dial-up internet. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines broadband as a connection with at least 100Mbps download speed and 20Mbps upload speed. St. Mary's County has adopted a holistic approach to improving digital access for county residents, achieving wired broadband connectivity for 99% of all county addresses offering speeds up to 1000Mbps download speed and 50Mbps upload speed.

Libraries

Three library facilities in Leonardtown, Lexington Park, and Charlotte Hall serve as important community resources,

offering a range of services from homework help to technology instruction.

Recreation and Parks

The county maintains over 13,000 acres of public parks, trails, beaches, museums, and recreational facilities. Many of these facilities are aging and will require future investment to maintain and expand services.

Education

St. Mary's County Public Schools serves over 16,000 students across 19 elementary, 5 middle, and 3 high schools, plus a career and technology center. However, some schools, particularly in Leonardtown and parts of California and Lexington Park, are over capacity, and much of the system's building infrastructure is aging.

Community Voices: Key Concerns and Priorities

Public engagement has been a cornerstone of the St. Mary's 2050 planning framework. Feedback from the public, including stakeholder interviews, small-group discussions, online surveys, and an interactive mapping exercise that captured specific infrastructure needs, revealed a clear consensus on the major challenges and opportunities facing the county's public facilities and infrastructure.

Water, Sewer, and Septic System Challenges

A predominant theme is the need to ensure the adequate provision of water and sewer service, particularly in designated Growth Areas. Community members and residents are deeply concerned about resilience, citing the increase in failing septic systems due to rising water tables and poor soils, which presents both a public health and an environmental challenge. There is strong interest in transitioning communities with failing septic and well infrastructure to centralized systems, with modular "package plants" frequently cited as a key potential solution for wastewater treatment in rural and growing areas like Charlotte Hall. The need for water/wastewater infrastructure investment was a key issue identified by residents in the interactive mapping exercise. At a policy level, aligning new connections and capacity upgrades with the land use plan was emphasized. Drainage fixes in legacy neighborhoods were also noted as complementary to wastewater improvements to protect water quality and reduce localized flooding.

Demand for Enhanced Community Facilities

There is a strong, consistent call for investment in community facilities. Residents desire more recreational facilities, including sports complexes,

pools, and youth entertainment venues. In CEW #2, community sports and recreation facilities both had extremely strong support for future long-term investment. Support for expanding libraries, improving schools to address overcrowding, and strengthening human services for the elderly and disabled is also prominent. Furthermore, residents want to see continued support for public safety, with some suggesting a transition to professional, paid Fire & EMS services to ensure long-term sustainability.

Ensuring Infrastructure Keeps Pace with Growth

A critical point identified by community members is the need to re-examine and strengthen adequate public facility requirements to ensure that infrastructure provision is concurrent with new development. There is a palpable concern that development is outpacing the capacity of public facilities, leading to issues like school overcrowding and increased traffic. Residents have called for infrastructure improvements to align with population growth and for a balance between growth and adequate infrastructure investments.

Broadband and Modern Utilities

While not as dominant as other themes, the need for modern infrastructure is present. Residents have specifically called for the expansion of fiber optic communication lines to homes, highlighting a desire for the high-speed

connectivity that is essential for modern economic participation and quality of life. Public input emphasized closing rural broadband gaps, coordinating with state and federal funding programs, and aligning fiber expansion with Growth Areas and public facility sites (schools, libraries, public safety) to amplify community benefits. While most of the backhaul infrastructure installed is fiber optic, a significant portion of infrastructure installed within the last mile (to the home) is legacy RF cable. Emphasis should be placed upon maximum upload and download speeds offered and monthly connectivity cost, with less emphasis on the medium which is used in construction.

An Integrated Planning Framework

Public facilities and infrastructure do not exist in a vacuum. Their planning and implementation are deeply intertwined with nearly every other aspect of the comprehensive plan. Recognizing these connections is essential for creating a successful and holistic strategy. In practice, the Planning Areas framework and Land Use Map guide where capital projects and services should go, and facility siting is considered alongside resiliency opportunity areas to serve people effectively and safely.

Infrastructure, Land Use, and Community Character

The availability of water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure is a primary driver of development patterns. Residents expressed a strong desire to keep growth from moving beyond areas where infrastructure is available and to direct it to designated Growth Areas to preserve the county's rural character. By strategically planning infrastructure extensions, particularly water and sewer services, the county can effectively guide growth to areas like Charlotte Hall and Lexington Park, while protecting its valuable farmland and natural landscapes from sprawl. Decisions about infrastructure are, in effect, decisions about the future land use and the character of the community.

Infrastructure and Public Health

The connection between infrastructure and public health is direct and undeniable. The issue of failing septic systems, as noted by residents, is a clear example where inadequate infrastructure becomes a public health and livability crisis, risking the contamination of groundwater and recreational waters. Meanwhile, investing in public facilities like parks, trails, and walkable communities encourages physical activity and improves health outcomes. Access to adequate healthcare facilities is another critical component of a healthy community.

Infrastructure and Environmental Resilience

Infrastructure planning is a critical tool for building resilience to environmental hazards. The County's Resiliency Opportunity Areas highlight places that warrant added focus in siting and hardening public facilities. The county faces challenges from rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and flooding, which threaten infrastructure and public safety. Decisions about where and how to build or upgrade facilities must account for these vulnerabilities. For example, promoting innovative septic systems or extending public sewer can mitigate nutrient pollution in the Chesapeake Bay, while robust stormwater management protects water quality. The location and design of public facilities in relation to identified Resiliency Opportunity Areas are crucial for protecting the county's most vulnerable populations.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

High-quality public facilities and reliable infrastructure are prerequisites for a healthy economy. Continued investment in the AeroPark Innovation District, supported by adequate utilities, is vital for the county's high-tech industries. A skilled workforce is dependent on a high-performing school system with modern facilities. Amenities like parks, libraries, and cultural sites contribute to a high quality of life, which is essential for

attracting and retaining the young, talented, and diverse workforce the county seeks to cultivate. With a tax base that is predominantly residential, targeting infrastructure to catalyze non-residential investment in Growth Areas strengthens long-term fiscal health.

Key Themes for the Public Facilities & Infrastructure Element

Synthesizing the data and community input, the following core themes should guide the development of the Public Facilities and Infrastructure Element for the St. Mary's 2050 Comprehensive Plan.

Strategic Modernization and Resilience

Proactively upgrade and maintain aging water, sewer, stormwater, and school facilities, and design new and replacement projects to meet permitting requirements and coastal flood risks. Prioritize retrofits in legacy neighborhoods and site/harden facilities in Resiliency Opportunity Areas to protect vulnerable populations; address wastewater "problem areas" with right-sized solutions.

Infrastructure-Guided Growth

Use public water/sewer and transportation investments to direct growth to designated areas — Development Districts (Lexington Park, Leonardtown) and Town Centers (Charlotte Hall, Hollywood) — supporting

reinvestment and redevelopment while preserving rural and sensitive lands. Map service areas to the Land Use Map and Planning Areas framework to sequence extensions and capacity improvements with planned growth.

Enhancing Quality of Life through Community Facilities:

Invest in a diverse and accessible network of public facilities, including parks, recreational opportunities, libraries, and public safety services, to meet the needs of a growing and aging population and enhance community well-being. Focus reinvestment where facilities reach the most residents and address documented aging assets.

Ensuring Equitable Access and Service:

Prioritize projects that close service gaps in historically underserved or vulnerable communities, using Resiliency Opportunity Areas and Social Vulnerability Index insights to target siting, hardening, and access improvements. Coordinate with partners to improve safe, multimodal access to facilities.

Fostering Collaborative and Sustainable Funding:

Pursue innovative and collaborative funding and operational models, including public-private partnerships and the potential for a stormwater utility, to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of infrastructure projects and services.

Building a Resilient Foundation for 2050

The public facilities and infrastructure of St. Mary's County are more than just pipes, buildings, and roads; they are the foundation upon which the county's future will be built. The community has spoken clearly, desiring a future with reliable services, vibrant community spaces, and infrastructure that supports both growth and preservation. By embracing an integrated, proactive, and strategic approach to planning, the county can make wise investments that will pay dividends for decades, ensuring that the St. Mary's of 2050 is a resilient, prosperous, and exceptional place for all.

WATER, WASTEWATER, AND STORMWATER TO SUPPORT GROWTH

GOAL 1: PROVIDE PLANNED WATER/SEWER FOR GROWTH AND REDUCE STORMWATER/NUTRIENT IMPACTS

Modernize central service in Growth Areas and reduce pollution from septic and stormwater to protect local waters and the Chesapeake Bay.

Policy 1.1: Implement the Comprehensive Water and Sewerage Plan and Guide Service to Growth Areas

Extend water and sewer in an orderly manner within Development Districts and Town/Village Centers and upgrade community systems to meet standards, as guided by the Comprehensive Water and Sewerage Plan (CWSP).

Action 1.1.1: Provide Central Water in Growth Areas and Upgrade Community Systems

Extend central water systems within Growth Areas per the CWSP, require connections where proximate, and upgrade community systems to meet standards, including fire flow.

Action 1.1.2: Provide Planned Sewer Service and Design to County Standards

Extend planned sewer within Growth Areas and require that new collection systems meet County and Metropolitan Commission standards.

Action 1.1.3: Update CWSP to Reflect Actual Service Areas, Support Development in Growth Areas, and Identify Areas of Concern

Conduct an update to the CWSP that converts a static policy document with maps to an online, dynamic tool that is updated over time to reflect updates to service areas as they occur. Consider evaluating the “not planned for service” areas to confirm that these areas are outside of the defined Growth Areas per the Planning Areas map. Consider removing the 3- and 6-year designations, and instead designate properties within 200 feet of existing infrastructure as “planned service.” Clarify that the timing of providing water and sewer infrastructure in planned service areas is driven by private development and is not provided in advance or front funded by the Metropolitan Commission. Consider creating a sewer category for identified problem sewer areas, where infrastructure expansions to these remote areas are not planned but where stand-alone community systems (i.e., package plants) may be a feasible option.

Action 1.1.4: Update the Adequate Public Facilities Provisions of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance

Update the Adequate Public Facilities provisions in Chapter 70.8 and 70.9 of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance to ensure the requirements for sewerage (Section 70.8) and water (Section 70.9) are consistent with the other public facility requirements and produce satisfactory results.

Action 1.1.5: Address Problem Sewer Areas and Problem Water Areas

Address problem water areas, problem sewer areas (like those with failing septic systems creating health and environmental hazards), and unfit systems that are not designated for planned service. Identify suitable land for the siting of stand-alone systems such as package treatment facilities in problem sewer areas, and identify potential funding sources for the construction of such facilities.

Policy 1.2: Upgrade Treatment and Manage to Nutrient Caps

Advance plant upgrades and operations that keep discharges within assigned nutrient caps and support Bay restoration.

Action 1.2.1: Implement Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades and Septic Mitigation

Complete planned upgrades to major wastewater treatment plants, encourage septic upgrades for individual properties, and identify failing septic clusters for targeted solutions. Upgrade treatment plants in

alignment with growth plans and projections, including the Growth Areas identified in this plan.

Policy 1.3: Manage Stormwater with ESD and MS4 Programs

Apply Environmental Site Design as the principal approach for new and redevelopment, retrofit existing problem areas, and implement MS4 program components, including post-construction management, illicit discharge detection and elimination, public education, and staff training.

Action 1.3.1: Implement the MS4 Program and Stormwater Best Practices

Develop and carry out programs that reduce pollutants in stormwater, address post-construction runoff, detect and eliminate illicit discharges, educate and engage the public, and train staff in protection measures.

Policy 1.4: Protect Groundwater and Private Community Systems

Site new wells appropriately, cap abandoned wells and require connections or upgrades of community systems to meet public health standards.

Action 1.4.1: Manage Groundwater and Private Community Water Systems

Direct new wells to appropriate aquifers and continue enforcement for community systems to connect to central water where required or to upgrade and maintain systems as needed.

ADEQUATE PUBLIC FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

GOAL 2: MAINTAIN COUNTY TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Ensure that the County's transportation infrastructure is well-maintained, efficient, and meets the needs of residents of all ages and abilities, as outlined in the most recent St. Mary's County Transportation Plan and in the Transportation Element of this plan.

Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

GOAL 3: MAINTAIN AND INCREASE QUALITY OF LIFE BY INVESTING IN CORE PUBLIC SERVICES

Maintain and increase the overall quality of life for county residents by investing in core public services such as Emergency Medical Services (EMS), public safety, and fire services.

Policy 3.1: Invest in Law Enforcement and Emergency Response Facilities and Equipment

Invest in law enforcement and emergency response systems.

Action 3.1.1: Implement Hazard Mitigation Policies

Implement policies from the 2023 St. Mary's County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan to improve disaster preparedness, in alignment with Public Health and Community Services Action 1.2.5: Promote and Implement Disaster and Emergency Plans.

Action 3.1.2: Conduct a Staffing and Operational Needs Assessment for the Sheriff's Office

In collaboration with LUGM and DED, assess the staffing and operational needs of the Sheriff's Office, aligned with population growth and development trends, to support long-term service capacity.

Action 3.1.3: Explore updates to the Essential Public Facilities in CZO

Assess the potential to add law enforcement, fire services, EMS, and potentially other

services as Essential Public Facilities in Section 70.4 of the CZO.

Policy 3.2: Budget for Core Capital Investments

Proactively budget for core capital investments and communicate the County tax dollars required to maintain the high level of service that residents desire.

Action 3.2.1: Invest in Water Tanks

Invest in water tanks in areas not served by water systems to provide adequate water supply for firefighting.

Policy 3.3: Establish Long-Term Fire and EMS Plans

Respond to the county's growth by exploring long-term fire and EMS needs. (See Public Health and Community Services Action 1.4.7: Ensure Adequate Water Supplies to Provide Fire Protection).Broadband and Electrical Utilities

BROADBAND AND ELECTRICAL UTILITIES

GOAL 4: EXPAND RELIABLE UTILITIES AND UNIVERSAL BROADBAND ACCESS

Provide reliable electric service and countywide access to high-speed internet to support safety, education, health, and economic competitiveness.

Policy 4.1: Improve Grid Reliability and Visual Quality

Coordinate utility upgrades with corridor projects to reduce outages and visual clutter, using shared easements and context-sensitive design.

Policy 4.2: Expand High-Speed Internet and Communications Networks

Continue partnering with providers to encourage commercial Internet Service Providers to expand wired broadband offerings in our community. Competition encourages innovation, improves services, and maintains costs to the consumer.

Action 4.2.1: Provide Efficient Electric Power and Communications and Support Telecommuting Infrastructure

Maintain and improve the delivery of electric power and communications systems and

require development projects to incorporate site and building features that support telework and flexible work arrangements.

Action 4.2.2: Foster Expanded Availability of High-Speed Internet Service

Work with private providers and partners to expand high-speed internet access countywide, focusing on underserved areas and leveraging external funding and right-of-way coordination.

Policy 4.3: Lead by Example in County Facilities

Advance energy and resource-efficient investments in County buildings and sites through life-cycle analysis and transparent annual reporting.

LIBRARIES AND GOVERNMENT FACILITIES

GOAL 5: KEEP ST. MARY'S COUNTY A DESIRABLE PLACE TO LIVE THROUGH COMMUNITY AMENITIES INVESTMENT

Keep St. Mary's County an attractive and desirable place to live and grow by investing in community sports and recreation facilities, libraries, and other public amenities.

Policy 5.1: Maintain and Create Public-Private Partnerships to Support Development of Recreation Facilities

Build on existing, and create new, public-private partnerships to support the development of indoor sports and recreation facilities, such as a sports dome, and arts and culture spaces and opportunities.

Policy 5.2: Strengthen the System of Libraries and Community Centers

Strengthen the system of libraries and community centers to maintain and

improve them as resources for all residents, especially children, while considering the development of new or expanded facilities in currently underserved areas.

Policy 5.3: Bolster County Support for Cultural Assets

Bolster County financial and organizational support, including public-private partnerships, for cultural assets like parks, museums, and historical sites. This will help to maintain them and increase awareness of the county's history and unique culture.



RECREATION AND PARKS

GOAL 6: EXPAND AND CONNECT PARKS, TRAILS, AND PUBLIC WATER ACCESS

Build an equitable, connected park and waterfront system that supports health, recreation, and tourism, serving users of all ages.

Policy 6.1: Implement the LPPRP and Park Master Plans

Implement the Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan and Park Master Plans (LRPPR). Program active parks, indoor facilities, and shared-use trails where demand is highest and growth is occurring.

Action 6.1.1: Expand a County-Wide System of Recreation Facilities in and Near Growth Areas

Use planning and the capital program to deliver a comprehensive park system, particularly active parks, located in and near Development Districts, Town Centers, and Village Centers.

Action 6.1.2: Provide Additional Fields, Court Facilities, and Shared-Use Trails

Add baseball/softball diamonds, multipurpose fields, indoor court facilities, and pedestrian/bicycle trails to meet current and projected demand.

Policy 6.2: Increase Public Access to the Water

Improve and add facilities for boating, fishing, and waterfront recreation, while protecting appropriately zoned waterfront lands for marine uses.

Action 6.2.1: Expand Recreation on the Water and at Waterfront Sites

Accommodate and promote fishing, boating, sailing, and related recreation by improving facilities and protecting appropriately zoned waterfront land for marinas and landings.

Action 6.2.2: Build Additional Water-Access Facilities

Deliver new public water-access facilities, including boat ramps and fishing areas, through the capital program and partnerships.

Action 6.2.3: Evaluate Myrtle Point Park for Public Access to the Patuxent River

Advance feasibility and project development for additional public access at Myrtle Point Park, with ADA access, lighting, and shoreline-sensitive design.

SCHOOLS

GOAL 7: ALIGN SCHOOL CAPACITY AND SITES WITH PLANNED GROWTH

Coordinate facilities so seats, sites, and access keep pace with development and educational needs.

Policy 7.1: Plan Capacity Proactively

Use enrollment projections and Growth Areas plans to time, site, and finance school projects, in partnership with the Board of Education of St. Mary's County and Leonardtown.

Action 7.1.1: Prepare and Maintain the Six-Year Educational Facilities Master Plan

Contribute to the annual preparation of a six-year Educational Facilities Master Plan (EFMP) and align project timing and siting with enrollment projections and planned Growth Areas.

Action 7.1.2: Recognize and Support a Full-Spectrum Educational System

Coordinate with education partners to provide facilities and programs that meet the needs of students at all levels, including career and technical pathways.

Policy 7.2: Site and Access Schools Safely

Favor locations with safe walk/bike/transit options and opportunities for shared use with parks and libraries.

Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

8

Public Health and Community Services Element

In This Section

[Planning for Public Health and Community Services](#)
[Health and Safety Needs](#)



Planning for Public Health and Community Services

National and Regional Trends

Health and the Built Environment

There is growing recognition that the way that communities are physically organized and built impacts health through factors like air quality, access to physical activity, access to recreational space for older adults and people with disabilities, protection from natural hazards, crime prevention through physical design choices, and even contribution towards providing a sense of belonging in a community and improved mental health. Amid this growing recognition of the wide variety of factors that influence health, St. Mary's County can work across departments and with community partners to address the multitude of factors that shape individual and public health.

An Aging Population

Nationally, the median age of residents is increasing, due to the aging of the "Baby Boomer" generation and declining birth rates, according to data from [the U.S. Census Bureau](#). Getting older can affect many different aspects of life, from healthcare to housing, transportation, recreational activities, and other social services. While the median age of St.

Mary's County residents is generally younger than the state and the nation, according to data from [the U.S. Census Bureau](#), its population is still aging, and continued preparation for the needs of older adults will be important.

Public Health and Community Services Approach

As the county continues to grow and age, it will be important to support health through the built environment and through programs and services, recognizing that health is impacted through a diverse array of policies, many of which are not usually considered to primarily be about health (such as the built environment, economic opportunity, transportation, and green space/the environment). This broad, holistic lens, combined with the specific recommendations in the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), will help guide St. Mary's County towards a healthier future.

The Local Health Department serves as the County's chief health strategist. In this role, the Health Department provides leadership to assess community health needs, convene cross-sector partners, leverage data and evidence, and align

policies, programs, and investments across health care, public health, and related systems to improve population health.

Health-related goals, objectives, and strategies within this Comprehensive Plan are informed by and coordinated with St. Mary's County's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), developed every six years by the Local Health Improvement Coalition (Healthy St. Mary's Partnership). County health actions identified in St. Mary's 2050 shall be reviewed and updated, as appropriate, to align with each new CHIP cycle to ensure responsiveness to evolving health needs, emerging data, and best practices.

Key Findings from Public Engagement

The public health and community services policies and actions in this chapter were developed in consideration of these factors and as guided by community engagement involving community members.

Several important takeaways emerged from this participation effort and an analysis of current conditions in St. Mary's County, which are described in more detail below.



Healthy Living

Supporting healthy lifestyles was important to many community members. Walkable communities, including access to shopping near residences, was identified as one way to support healthy living. Community members also called for more recreational facilities, including sports complexes, pools, and other entertainment for youth. Parks, trails, and public green spaces and beaches were also identified as important for quality of life and healthy lifestyles. Farmers' markets and community gardens were strongly supported as well, providing healthy food options and connecting community members with local farms.

Healthcare Access

Community members encouraged the expansion of healthcare access across the county. This includes urgent care centers and specialized medical facilities, including services tailored for the needs of older adults.

Aging in Place

As residents age, many see increased need for support to allow residents to 'age in place' allowing residents to stay in their homes as they get older. Such services range from updates to the home's physical accessibility, in-home care services to support day-to-day needs, healthcare services, assistance with proper nutrition through the home delivered meals and congregate meals programs, providing activities and

programs through the three senior activity centers to help older adults remain active and vibrant, assistance with navigating Medicare benefits, providing volunteer opportunities through the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), educating the community about the varied programs and services, hosting many large-scale community events throughout the year, and transportation services.

Emergency Response

Many community members mentioned the importance of emergency response and law enforcement capabilities, supporting improvements in these areas. Community members also called for enhanced community policing and crime prevention.



HEALTH AND SAFETY NEEDS

GOAL 1: MEET THE HEALTH AND SAFETY NEEDS OF THE GROWING POPULATION

Ensure access to healthcare, community services, public health services, and public safety services for all county residents.

Policy 1.1: Strengthen Health Care and Public Health Systems

Maintain a strong, resilient, and coordinated health system that integrates a comprehensive health care delivery system with a robust public health infrastructure. A comprehensive health care delivery system includes timely access to primary care, behavioral and mental health, specialty care, and allied health and wellness services, supported by workforce, facilities, housing (see Housing Element), and land use policies. The healthcare delivery system should coordinate with the Local Health Department as the coordinating nexus, working alongside public and private partners to advance prevention, health promotion, and community wellness.

This policy reflects the recommendations of the Maryland Commission on Public Health and aligns with nationally recognized Foundational Public Health Capabilities and Foundational Public Health Areas that local public health infrastructure should address (see the box to the right for more details).

Eight Foundational Public Health Capabilities

1. Assessment and surveillance
2. Community partnership development
3. Equity
4. Organizational competencies
5. Policy development and support
6. Accountability and performance management
7. Emergency preparedness and response
8. Communications

Five Foundational Public Health Areas (programmatic focus)

1. Communicable disease control
2. Chronic disease and injury prevention
3. Environmental public health
4. Maternal, child, and family health
5. Access to and linkage with clinical care
6. Behavioral health (added per Maryland Commission on Public Health)

Together, these capabilities and areas ensure that St. Mary's County can deliver effective public health functions, coordinate with health care and community partners, and maintain a resilient system to protect and promote the health of all residents.

Action 1.1.1: Coordinate a Comprehensive Health and Public Health System

The Health Department shall convene community members to sustain a comprehensive ecosystem of health care and public health services, ensuring coordination across primary care, behavioral health, specialty care, and allied health, alongside prevention, health promotion, and other public health functions. This should include attention to a comprehensive continuum of care across the lifespan. The Health Department, as the chief health strategist, will facilitate data-driven planning, cross-sector collaboration, and alignment with Foundational Public Health Capabilities and Areas.

Action 1.1.2: Assess Health Care and Public Health Capacity and Address Gaps

Conduct regular assessments of health care delivery and public health system capacity, including workforce, facilities, technology, data, services, and community partnerships. Identify gaps in access to primary care, behavioral health, specialty care, and public health programs, including for underserved and vulnerable populations. Develop a coordinated action plan to address gaps, aligned with Foundational Public Health Capabilities and the six-year CHIP cycle, prioritizing population health impact.

Action 1.1.3: Convene the Local Board of Health and Provide Regular Health System Briefings

In accordance with Maryland Health-General §3-501 et seq., the Health Officer shall convene the Local Board of Health at least

twice annually. These meetings shall provide reports on community health status, system capacity, gaps, CHIP progress, and public health emergency readiness, ensuring transparency, accountability, and alignment with Foundational Capabilities.

Action 1.1.4: Align County Health Actions with the Community Health Improvement Plan

Implement County-specific health and public health strategies in alignment with the six-year CHIP cycle, with technical leadership from the Health Department. Review and update actions as CHIP priorities evolve to maintain consistency with population health needs, Foundational Public Health Capabilities, and public health areas including behavioral health.

Action 1.1.5: Sustain Core Behavioral Health and Wellness Services

Collaborate with public, private, and non-governmental partners to ensure access to mental health, substance use, and wellness services. Integrate these efforts with public health initiatives and CHIP priorities to advance population-level behavioral health outcomes. Provide training and support to law enforcement officers and criminal justice system partners to identify behavioral health needs and make appropriate referrals in coordination with the Health Department.

Action 1.1.6: Address the Health Needs of Veterans

Develop programs and partnerships to help veterans access primary care, behavioral health, and other critical health services while using their medical benefits.

Action 1.1.7: Advance Early Intervention and Prevention Programs

Work with community partners to implement early intervention and prevention programs across behavioral, physical, and environmental health. Utilize data from the Health Department and CHIP to target services for children, youth, and other at-risk populations, ensuring integration with public health and health care delivery systems. Ensure collaboration across the health department, schools, law enforcement, and other service providers to identify youth in need and make appropriate referrals to early intervention and prevention activities.

Action 1.1.8: Strengthen and Sustain Health and Wellness Workforce

Develop a comprehensive workforce strategy to attract, train, and retain professionals across public health, health care (including primary care, behavioral health, oral health, specialty care, and allied health), and wellness services. Workforce development shall also focus on recruiting and supporting community health workers, care coordinators, and peer recovery support specialists to enhance population health outcomes. Strategy shall be informed by the workforce recommendations of the Maryland Commission on Public Health and the St. Mary's County CHIP. Key strategies include:

- Southern Maryland Area Health Education Center (AHEC) that coordinates with local schools to promote a local pipeline of health and wellness professionals

- Locally available student internships, medical residency rotations, and certificate or degree programs designed to meet local workforce needs
- Incentives such as loan repayment, tuition assistance, relocation support, and housing financing assistance to support recruitment and retention
- Structured mentorship programs and career advancement pathways to improve retention and professional development
- Engagement and support for community health workers, care coordinators, and peer recovery support specialists to ensure culturally competent, community-centered care

Action 1.1.9: Advance Technology and Data Modernization to Support Health and Wellness Systems

Implement technology and data-driven solutions to enhance the efficiency, reach, and effectiveness of St. Mary's County's health and public health workforce. These solutions shall support both clinical and population health functions, strengthen care coordination, and improve access to services for residents. Technology and data modernization initiatives shall align with the County's CHIP priorities, support Public Health 3.0 principles, and extend the capacity of the health and wellness workforce while promoting accessibility and high-quality care. Key strategies include:

- Expansion of telehealth and telemedicine services to increase access to primary care, behavioral health, and specialty care
- Implementation and optimization of interoperable data systems, health information exchanges, and electronic

- health record systems to support coordinated care
- Integration of clinical decision support tools to enhance evidence-based practice and workflow efficiency
- Use of remote patient monitoring technologies to enable proactive care management and reduce avoidable hospitalizations
- Application of artificial intelligence and analytics to inform population health interventions
- Provision of virtual education, simulation, and training tools for workforce development and continuing education
- Deployment of digital community health tools to support prevention, health promotion, and chronic disease management
- Implementation of workforce efficiency tools to optimize scheduling, task management, and collaborative care

Policy 1.2: Support a Health in All Policies Approach

Support projects and programs that primarily focus on recreation, quality of life, economic opportunity, public facilities, or other areas that also benefit the health of St. Mary's County residents.

Action 1.2.1: Consider Health Impacts as Part of Development Review Process

As part of the review process for legislatively decided development projects, provide an assessment of health impacts in the staff reports provided to the Planning Commission.

Action 1.2.2: Update the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance to Consider Community Health

Evaluate the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance for opportunities to address community health through updated use regulations, development regulations, or development review procedures. Priority actions could include:

- Add requirements in the development review process for multimodal connectivity, complete streets, green infrastructure, mixed uses, and access to facilities and services. These requirements support active living, access to healthy food, and access to key healthcare services. Include healthcare access in staff reports on potential development impacts.
- Evaluate additional ways for the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance to reduce environmental health risks, such as reducing air and noise pollution, minimizing exposure to extreme heat, and reducing wildfire risk.
- Identify other Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance changes that can support public health, in alignment with the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). For example, the current CHIP identifies a chronic disease strategy of addressing tobacco-related health disparities. A zoning ordinance change in support of this could include limiting tobacco and vaping retailer density to limit the total number of retailers, mandating minimum distances between retailers, or prohibiting retailers in certain areas (such as near schools, parks, or residential neighborhoods).

Action 1.2.3: Establish Level of Service Standards for Parks, Green Spaces, and Community Hubs

Establish level of service standards for the provision of parks and green spaces within walking distance of all residents, which would improve resident health and quality of life.

Action 1.2.4: Support Efforts of Recreation and Parks to Promote Healthy and Safe Physical Activities

Recreation and Parks and the Local Health Department collaborate to promote healthy and safe activities for all seasons and all ages, and to enhance the physical and mental health of community members.

Action 1.2.5: Promote and Implement Disaster and Emergency Plans

Collaboration with the Local Health Department and Department of Emergency Services, the Sheriff's Office, the Department of Information Technology, and the Department of Public Works and Transportation for disaster and emergency management planning, disaster response, and interagency coordination. Active collaboration and plan implementation protects the health of the community and improves the capacity and capabilities of the local public health and healthcare delivery systems.

Action 1.2.6: Support Environmental Health Projects and Programs

Support environmental health projects and programs that minimize exposure to polluted

air, unsafe drinking and recreational water, flood and wildfire risk, mosquitos and ticks, unsafe housing, noise pollution, and hazardous substances. Such measures would benefit the health of the natural environment while protecting the health of the community.

Action 1.2.7: Include Law Enforcement in Public Health Strategies

Include law enforcement in planning and response strategies for public health emergencies and substance use crises.

Policy 1.3: Support Community Services and Social Services

Support community services and social services, including services led by the County and services led by partner organizations.

Action 1.3.1: Support and Administer Federal and State Financial Support Programs

Support and administer federal and state financial programs necessary to assist citizens of the County in areas related to income assistance, welfare programs, medical assistance, adult services, child support, child welfare, and daycare assistance. Ensure that services are available to clients with limited resources.

Action 1.3.2: Provide Support for Organizations, Services, and Facilities Providing Temporary or Transitional Housing

Support organizations, services and facilities which provide temporary or transitional

housing for families in the event of an emergency or family crisis.

Action 1.3.3: Partner with Social Service Providers on Programs to Increase Food Access and Security

Work with social service providers, Family and Consumer Sciences at the University of Maryland Extension, Health Department, and the Farmers Feeding St. Mary's Program, with the Department of Aging & Human Services as the lead, to increase reliable access to nutritious food to residents facing food insecurity.

Action 1.3.4: Support and Expand Local Farmers' Markets

Increase the availability of healthy, locally produced food by supporting and expanding local farmers' markets.

Policy 1.4: Support Public Safety Resources

Support adequate public safety resources to reduce crime, injuries, and property damage.

Action 1.4.1: Achieve and Maintain Adequate Emergency Services and Law Enforcement Staffing Levels

Achieve and maintain adequate emergency services and law enforcement staffing levels and employee retention to serve the current and future population of the county. Ensure the availability of fire and rescue companies to report to multiple or high value alarms.

Action 1.4.2: Achieve and Maintain Rapid Response Times

Strive for response times that are appropriate to the geography and service model of the county, with performance benchmarks tailored to urban, suburban, and rural areas.



Action 1.4.3: Ensure Adequate Public Safety Coverage Across the County

Provide adequate new stations and office space in Growth Areas to accommodate current and future public safety needs. Ensure that remote areas of the county have adequate coverage.

Action 1.4.4: Develop and Monitor Key Performance Indicators for Law Enforcement

Develop and monitor key performance indicators for law enforcement, including response times, clearance rates, and service coverage to support accountability and inform resource allocation assessments.

Action 1.4.5: Examine Opportunities to Utilize Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

In targeted areas experiencing higher crime rates, examine opportunities to reduce crime and increase perception of safety through the design of the built environment, using the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

Action 1.4.6: Continue Support of Fire Suppression and Emergency Services

Continue to require adequate fire suppression for approval of major subdivisions and major site plans. Require contributions from developers towards fire stations, rescue squads, and related apparatus and equipment when the development can be directly linked to the need for additional capital improvements.

Action 1.4.7: Ensure Adequate Water Supplies to Provide Fire Protection

Ensure that adequate water supplies and other specialized suppression agents, such as those needed for lithium battery fires, are available to support fire protection for all land uses in the County. In Growth Areas, use central supply systems. In rural areas where water service is from small central systems or individual wells, provide standpipes or other infrastructure to draw on existing water impoundment areas, such as lakes and farm ponds.

Action 1.4.8: Support Adequate Facilities, Services, and Programs for Animal Control

Support adequate facilities and services to collect, house, and care for stray, abandoned, abused, or nuisance animals. Encourage programs for animal adoption and spaying and neutering to control population growth.

Action 1.4.9: Promote Safer Communities by Expanding Access to Education, Employment, Housing, and Other Social Services

Alongside key community partners, implement the policies and actions described in this plan to expand access to and improve education, health, economic opportunity, housing, and other social services. Improving these aspects of quality of life can reduce crime and improve income levels and social opportunities.

Action 1.4.10: Build Public Trust in Law Enforcement Through Community Engagement

Encourage community policing strategies and public engagement programs to build public trust and improve public safety outcomes.

Action 1.4.11: Invest in Technology Infrastructure for Law Enforcement, Emergency Services, and Related Public Services

Support investment in law enforcement, emergency services, and related public service technology infrastructure, including mobile data systems, digital evidence management, and communications upgrades to support operational efficiency.



GOAL 2: ENHANCE THE AVAILABILITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES FOR AGING RESIDENTS

Enhance the availability of public services for aging residents to ensure they can live and age well in St. Mary's County.

Policy 2.1: Invest in the Department of Aging and Human Services

Invest in the Department of Aging and Human Services so that it not only maintains, but expands, its variety and scope of services and programs, from volunteering programs and activity center resources for seniors, to adding support for children and families who the department works with.

Policy 2.2: Support Aging in Place Services and Activities

Support aging in place services that allow residents to stay in their homes, such as the Senior Care and other programs, along with healthcare and well-being services and connections to public and private programs that help keep older adults well.

Action 2.2.1: Expand Services and Activities for Aging Populations

Continue and expand services for aging populations, including meal delivery, caregiver support, in-home support, social programming, community outreach, volunteering opportunities, and sharing information about housing, Medicare, Social Security, and other benefit programs.

Support efforts of the Department of Aging &

Human Services to promote healthy and safe activities with a focus on older adults.

Policy 2.3: Facilitate the Development of Affordable Senior Housing

Facilitate the development of more attainably priced senior housing so that older residents are able to stay in their communities as they age.

Action 2.3.1: Promote Attainable Housing and Home Maintenance Programs That Meet the Needs of Older Adults

Support new attainable housing developments accessible to older adults. Support home maintenance programs that allow older adults to stay in their homes.

Policy 2.4: Maintain and Expand Special Transportation Services for Seniors

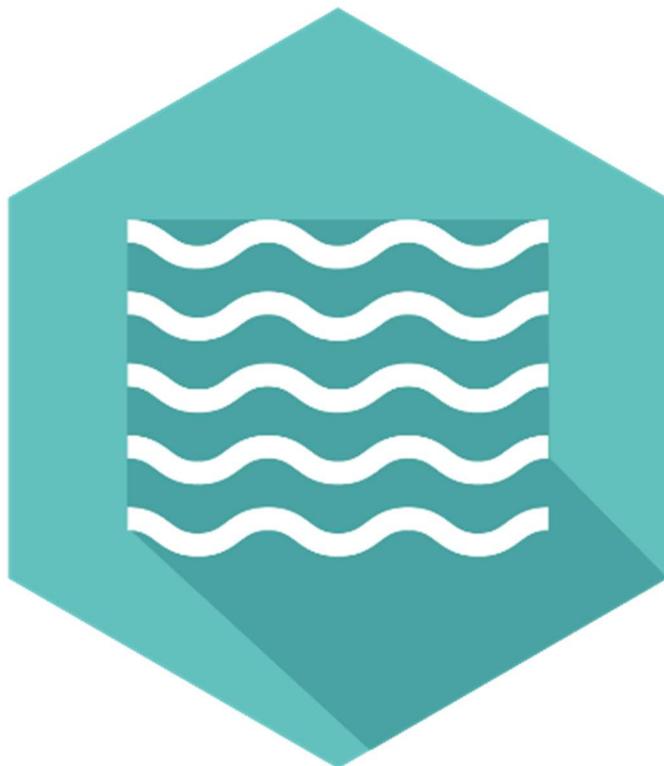
Maintain and expand special transportation services for seniors, such as the Senior Rides Program. Such transportation services help older adults access healthcare, services, shopping, and entertainment, while remaining in their homes.

9

Natural Hazards, Vulnerability, and Resiliency Element

In This Section

[Planning for Natural Hazards, Vulnerability, and Resiliency](#)
[Resiliency](#)



Planning for Natural Hazards, Vulnerability, and Resiliency

This element establishes a framework to reduce risk, protect people and property, and sustain St. Mary's County's working landscapes and waterfront economy in the face of severe weather, flooding, shoreline change, sea level rise, and other hazards. It connects current risk conditions to land use choices, capital planning, building standards, and resource conservation. It also aligns community values by preserving rural character, supporting agriculture and aquaculture, protecting waterways, and focusing growth in appropriate areas with specific resiliency actions. The policies and implementation of items that follow derive directly from this framework.

How to Read and Use This Element

Exurban Growth Pressure

The element begins with an assessment of risk, using County maps and analyses to identify where people, structures, and infrastructure are exposed to flooding, erosion, storm surge, high winds, or wildfire. It then applies guiding principles that direct growth away from vulnerable areas, harden essential facilities, use natural systems first, and focus on public investment where risk reduction has the greatest return. It outlines key tools such

as zoning updates, floodplain and building standards, shoreline and habitat projects, drainage and transportation retrofits, and public education. It emphasizes sequencing investments to prioritize repetitive loss areas and critical infrastructure and concludes with a framework for monitoring and adjustment as conditions evolve.

Current Risk Context

St. Mary's County lies between the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers and the Chesapeake Bay, with much of its population, employment, and infrastructure near tidal waters and floodplains. This geography creates concentrated exposure to coastal flooding, storm surge, nuisance inundation, and shoreline erosion across multiple communities and transportation corridors.

The County faces four dominant hazard pathways. Coastal and riverine flooding cause repetitive losses and damage to homes, businesses, and emergency routes. Shoreline erosion and bluff instability along the Bay and Patuxent result in property loss and sediment loading. Sea level rise creates chronic inundation and amplifies storm impacts, while high winds and compound storm events increase both physical damage

and recovery costs. Periodic drought also heightens wildfire risks in rural and forested areas.

These hazards affect people, working lands, public infrastructure, and natural systems. Residents face rising insurance costs, property loss, and health concerns related to flooding and septic failure. Farms experience saltwater intrusion, drainage changes, and crop viability issues. Watermen, marinas, and aquaculture operators contend with infrastructure vulnerability and shoreline degradation. Public facilities, roads, and utilities in low-lying areas require protection or relocation, while wetlands and floodplain forests face increasing stress from erosion and habitat shifts.

Cross-Cutting Themes from Engagement

Community engagement reinforced the importance of aligning hazard mitigation with broader land use and conservation goals. Participants consistently emphasized protecting rural character and water quality while focusing on growth in designated centers. There was broad support for limiting sprawl, preserving farmland, and directing investment to places that already have infrastructure. These views closely align with reducing development pressure in flood-prone and erosion-vulnerable areas.

Residents expressed growing concern about inland drainage issues, rising

groundwater, and failing septic systems that threaten water quality and public health. They called for coordination between County agencies and MetCom to address failing systems and plan future transitions to centralized services where appropriate. Emergency access, particularly for older residents in isolated communities, was identified as a critical issue during severe weather events.

The County's agricultural and waterfront economies emerged as key themes. Participants highlighted the need to sustain working lands and seafood operations through adaptation strategies. Priorities included mapping and managing saltwater intrusion hotspots, cost-share programs for on-farm drainage improvements, and expanded riparian buffers to slow runoff and protect water quality. At the shoreline, community members supported living shoreline approaches and pilot projects that protect marinas, seafood landings, and aquaculture hubs while enhancing habitat.

Education and shared responsibility were also recurring themes. Residents seek clear, accessible information on risks, insurance options, and mitigation actions. There is support for mandatory disclosure of flood and sea level rise risks in real estate transactions. Community members emphasized coordination across agencies and partnerships with the Navy to ensure that land use decisions align with defense community

resilience goals, including implementation of recommendations from the Military Installation Resilience Review for NAS Patuxent River (NAS Pax).

Framework: Principles, Levers, and Applications

This framework rests on five guiding principles that connect community priorities with actionable policy. The first principle is to keep people and critical services out of harm's way through updated maps, clear disclosure, strategic growth management, and resilient building standards. The second principle is to use natural systems as the first line of defense, prioritizing conservation of floodplain forests, wetlands, and buffers, and promoting living shorelines wherever feasible. The third principle focuses on retrofitting infrastructure and working lands for function under stress by targeting road elevations, culvert upgrades, on-farm storage, and risk-based siting for critical facilities. The fourth principle seeks to align rules, incentives, and partnerships by strengthening floodplain standards, coordinating conservation investments, and integrating defense community resilience planning. The fifth principle emphasizes building public capacity through education, technical assistance, and access to reliable risk data.

Application: Where the Framework Connects to Policy

Each policy theme in this element operationalizes one or more of the guiding principles. Policies to limit development in vulnerable areas apply the principles of risk avoidance and natural system protection by tightening floodplain limits and preserving steep slopes and hydric soils. Floodplain and storm resilience policies emphasize infrastructure retrofits, vegetation retention, and community participation in FEMA's Community Rating System. Building standards integrate elevation, abandonment, and risk-based siting requirements to reduce long-term exposure. Shoreline protection actions promote living shorelines and demonstration projects that balance property protection with ecological goals. Sea level rise and long-term adaptation strategies incorporate projections into land use decisions and facilitate conservation of wetland migration corridors. Natural systems integration ensures buffers and wetlands are treated as infrastructure, while community capacity initiatives provide residents, farmers, and businesses with the tools and knowledge to adapt. Public investment policies ensure that County capital projects support risk reduction and long-term service continuity.

Implementation Priorities

Implementation in the near term will focus on embedding risk-informed standards in development regulations, scaling up natural infrastructure, and protecting critical access and utility systems. The County will expand wetland and stream buffers and preserve steep and erodible slopes. It will establish a living shoreline policy and develop conservation targeting maps for floodplain forests and migration corridors. Roadway and culvert improvements will reduce repetitive closures on key routes. Coordination with the hazard mitigation plan will guide investment in water and sewer infrastructure. Pilot programs will demonstrate on-farm storage and working waterfront resilience, while data and outreach initiatives will improve risk communication and disclosure. Integration of NAS Pax resilience strategies will ensure compatible land use and capital planning.

Metrics and Monitoring

Progress will be tracked through a concise performance dashboard. Key metrics will include the number of repetitive loss

properties mitigated, miles of storm-hardened roads, and acres of natural buffers and living shorelines created. Exposure management will be measured by the share of new development outside mapped hazard areas and the use of risk disclosure in permitting. Community capacity will be gauged through participation in education programs and improvements in Community Rating System (CRS) classification. The County will also monitor on-farm and waterfront adaptation projects to document economic and environmental benefits.

Alignment with the Comprehensive Plan Vision

This framework advances the Comprehensive Plan vision to protect rural character and water quality, support agriculture and aquaculture, focus growth in appropriate places, and sustain a resilient local economy. It translates community values into specific, measurable steps that strengthen the County's capacity to prepare for, adapt to, and recover from the hazards it faces today and will confront more frequently in the future.

RESILIENCY

GOAL 1: INCREASE THE COUNTY'S RESILIENCY BY PREPARING FOR SEVERE WEATHER EVENTS

Strengthen the County's ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from severe weather, flooding, sea level rise, and other hazards through proactive planning, regulation, and investment. Resiliency in St. Mary's also means sustaining the County's working farms, forests, and aquaculture - which are key to rural character, heritage, and economic stability - by directing conservation investment to priority landscapes and adapting coastal and agricultural operations to rising water and storm impacts.

Policy 1.1: Limit Development in Vulnerable Areas

Protect tidal and nontidal floodplains, steep slopes, erodible soils, and hydric soils from disturbance to reduce flood risks, erosion hazards, and ecological degradation.

Action 1.1.1: Limit Development in the Floodplain

Limit and manage development in the 100-year floodplain through buffers, easements, and prohibitions on new lots, fill, and stormwater detention structures.

Action 1.1.2: Preserve Steep Slopes

Preserve steep slopes over 25% from disturbance; discourage development on 15–25% slopes unless no alternative exists.

Action 1.1.3: Manage Erosion-Prone Soils

Minimize disturbance of highly erodible soils and establish protective buffers adjacent to streams, wetlands, and shorelines.

Action 1.1.4: Facilitate Natural Land Conversion

Apply buffer expansion criteria to hydric soils and facilitate natural conversion to wetlands to accommodate sea level rise.

Policy 1.2: Strengthen Floodplain and Storm Resilience

Protect county residents and properties by strengthening floodplain and storm resilience.

Action 1.2.1: Continue to Enforce Floodplain Regulations

Continue to enforce floodplain regulations by maintaining natural vegetation, prohibiting clearing, and requiring reforestation in sparsely vegetated floodplains.

Action 1.2.2: Maintain Eligibility for Insurance Programs

Maintain eligibility for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and maintain reduced rates through FEMA's Community Rating System (CRS).

Action 1.2.3: Explore a Countywide “No Adverse Impact” Program

Evaluate adoption of a “No Adverse Impact” approach to floodplain management to complement the 2016 Floodplain Ordinance.

Action 1.2.4: On-Farm Flood Mitigation

Explore the options for cost-share for farm BMPs that attenuate peaks (on-farm ponds/micro-storage, controlled tile/ditch structures, grassed waterways) in 100-year contributing areas; prioritize fields over Highly Erodible Soils.

Policy 1.3: Strengthen Resilient Infrastructure and Building Standards

Ensure infrastructure and structures are designed, sited, and managed to withstand hazards including flooding, high winds, and sea level rise.

Action 1.3.1: Require Resilient Building

As needed, require elevated building design, resilient foundation systems, flood-resistant materials, and abandonment/removal standards for impacted structures.

Action 1.3.2: Integrate Risk Assessment

Integrate risk assessment and vulnerability analysis into all public infrastructure siting, upgrades, and replacements.

Action 1.3.3: Incorporate the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan

Incorporate the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan by reference into County

facility planning and to help protect critical water and sewer infrastructure.

Action 1.3.4: Prioritize High-Risk Mitigation Projects

Prioritize high-risk roadways and repetitive loss properties for targeted mitigation projects.

Action 1.3.5: Incorporate the Patuxent Military Installation Resilience Review

Prioritize investment in the resilience projects identified in the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC)-funded Military Installation Resilience Review (MIRR) project for Naval Air Station Patuxent River.

Policy 1.4: Enhance Risk Assessment, Mapping, and Public Awareness

Increase awareness of risks through risk assessment, mapping vulnerable lands, and public education.

Action 1.4.1: Map Vulnerable Lands

Map remaining vulnerable lands, infrastructure, and facilities subject to flooding, erosion, or sea level rise that have not already been mapped by the County or State.

Action 1.4.2: Maintain Risk Assessment Maps

Maintain updated risk assessment maps for public review and consider mandatory disclosure of projected risks in real estate transactions.

Action 1.4.3: Expand Public Education on Resilience

Expand public education on flood hazards, insurance options, and household resilience practices.

Policy 1.5: Strengthen Shoreline Protection and Hazard Mitigation

Facilitate shoreline stabilization, hazard mitigation, and land conservation practices that balance property protection with habitat preservation.

Action 1.5.1: Promote Living Shorelines

Promote use of living shoreline designs for erosion control wherever feasible.

Action 1.5.2: Allow Conditional Shoreline Protection Measures

As needed, allow shoreline protection measures only when they minimize erosion on adjacent properties and protect habitat resources.

Action 1.5.3: Identify Shorelines in Need of Enhancement

Evaluate shoreline conditions and prioritize areas needing enhanced protection.

Action 1.5.4: Working Waterfront Pilots

Create a demonstration program with land trusts and MD agencies to install living shorelines at marinas, seafood landings, and aquaculture hubs, tracking wave-energy reduction and habitat outcomes.



GOAL 2: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATION FOR LONG-TERM RESILIENCY

Prepare the County's residents, ecosystems, and built environment for long-term risks such as sea level rise, storm surge, flooding, and shifting habitats.

Policy 2.1: Plan for Sea Level Rise and Long-Term Impacts

Anticipate and accommodate projected long-term risks in land use and resource planning.

Action 2.1.1: Incorporate Sea Level Rise Projections

Incorporate sea level rise projections into all relevant land use plans and zoning updates.

Action 2.1.2: Conserve Upland Migration Corridors

Include conservation of upland migration corridors for wetlands in land preservation efforts.

Action 2.1.3: Support Adaptive Retreat Strategies

Promote retreat strategies for vulnerable natural resources and public infrastructure where protection is infeasible.

Action 2.1.4: Saltwater-Intrusion Hotspot Plan

Map and prioritize farm fields experiencing brackish inundation and implement adaptation pathways (crop shifts, transition to marsh, or easements) synchronized with upland migration corridors.

Policy 2.2: Integrate Natural Systems into Resiliency Planning

In resiliency planning efforts, integrate and utilize natural systems.

Action 2.2.1: Prioritize Natural Buffers

Prioritize conservation of floodplain forests, hydric soils, and wetlands as natural buffers.

Action 2.2.2: Expand Buffers in Development Plans

Incorporate expanded wetland and stream buffers into subdivision plats and site plans.

Action 2.2.3: Coordinate Wetland Protection

Coordinate enforcement of wetland and buffer protections across County and State agencies.

Action 2.2.4: Agricultural Riparian Buffers

Expand forested buffers along ditches and streams on farms to slow runoff, trap sediment, and cool waters; coordinate with the County's wetland/buffer enforcement.

Policy 2.3: Build Community Capacity for Resiliency

Empower residents and businesses with tools, education, and resources to prepare for and adapt to natural hazards.

Action 2.3.1: Expand Public Outreach

Expand public outreach on flood risk, insurance programs, and available incentives for retrofits.

Action 2.3.2: Partner on Retrofits

Partner with local organizations to provide technical assistance for resilient retrofits and hazard mitigation.

Action 2.3.3: Encourage Household Preparedness

Encourage household-level preparedness through stormwater management, rain gardens, and emergency planning.

Action 2.3.4: Producer Education

Partner with the Soil Conservation District and land trusts on workshops for farm/aquaculture retrofits, insurance literacy (including National Flood Insurance Program/Community Rating System (NFIP/CRS) benefits), and business continuity planning.

Policy 2.4: Ensure Resilient Infrastructure and Public Investments

Design, site, and manage public infrastructure and facilities to reduce vulnerability, extend service life, and support rapid recovery after severe weather events and long-term environmental shifts.

Action 2.4.1: Assess Risk and Vulnerability for Siting and Design

Incorporate risk and vulnerability assessments into siting and design decisions for all new and replacement public facilities, including critical infrastructure.

Action 2.4.2: Reduce Repetitive Loss

Reduce repetitive flood losses by prioritizing mitigation investments in high-risk properties and roadways.

Action 2.4.3: Utilize Shoreline Condition Assessments

Utilize shoreline conditions assessments to guide infrastructure investments and protective measures.

Action 2.4.4: Integrate Hazard Mitigation and Nuisance Flood Plans

Incorporate hazard mitigation plans by reference into the County's public facilities planning process.

Action 2.4.5: Rural Roads and Access

Prioritize storm-hardening and elevation of farm-to-market roads and seafood landing access routes that experience repetitive closures, coordinated with the Shoreline Conditions Assessment and road-closure inventory.

10

Implementation

In This Section

[Enacting the Plan](#)

[Monitoring and Updating](#)

[Action Plan](#)

Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

Enacting the Plan

Effective implementation is the cornerstone of transforming a community's vision into reality. This chapter provides a strategic framework for implementing the St. Mary's 2050 Comprehensive Plan, ensuring that the collective voice of county residents translates into meaningful action. The implementation strategies outlined here establish clear pathways for achieving the goals identified throughout this planning process while maintaining accountability and adaptability over time.

Community-Centered Implementation

The development of the St. Mary's 2050 plan was built on the foundation of robust community engagement, incorporating resident input through three Community Engagement Windows from project inception through plan completion. To maintain this community focus during implementation, this chapter synthesizes public input into actionable priorities that are achievable. The implementation framework recognizes that successful comprehensive planning requires ongoing community involvement beyond plan adoption. St. Mary's residents should be engaged throughout this plan's lifetime.

Strategic Partnership with County Leadership

Implementation Reporting

To ensure accountability and maintain implementation momentum, the County will undertake reporting to the Planning Commission and Commissioners of St. Mary's County.

This reporting includes:

- Triennial Reporting
- 5-Year Implementation Performance Review
- 10-Year Mandatory Review

Budget Integration and Capital Planning

The Comprehensive Plan should serve as a guiding framework for budget development and capital improvement programming. This approach enables the Commissioners of St. Mary's County to make informed decisions about resource allocation while ensuring that budget decisions will support implementation.

This plan recommends:

- Aligning annual budget requests with plan priorities, when possible
- Using the plan as evaluation criteria for capital improvement projects
- Integrating comprehensive plan goals into departmental budget requests

Monitoring and Updating

Triennial Reporting

The County will prepare a report by July 1st every three years to monitor ongoing implementation of St. Mary's 2050 plan. This report will summarize the actions taken consistent with the Implementation Matrix as described below. This report will document and evaluate the performance measures and indicators tracking progress toward Plan objectives.

5-Year Implementation Performance Review

To track implementation progress, the County will conduct a mid-cycle performance review at the five-year mark. This assessment will evaluate advancement of the Plan's policies in accordance with Section 1-207(c)(6) of the Land Use Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, which will include the following:

- Summary of development trends contained in the previous annual reports filed during the 5-year period
- Status of comprehensive plan implementation tools, such as comprehensive rezoning, to carry out the provisions of the comprehensive plan
- Identification of any significant changes to existing programs, zoning ordinances, regulations, financing

programs, or State requirements necessary to achieve the visions and goals of the comprehensive plan during the remaining planning timeframe

- Identification of any State or federal laws, regulations, or requirements that have impeded local implementation of the comprehensive plan and recommendations to remove any impediments
- Future land use challenges and issues
- Summary of any potential updates to the comprehensive plan

10-Year Mandatory Review Cycle

Maryland state law requires a review and update of a local jurisdiction's comprehensive plan at least once every ten years (Section 1-416 of the Land Use Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland). St. Mary's 2050 fulfills this required review as outlined in the Land Use Article, establishing a framework that will be reassessed and, if needed, updated every ten years to reflect evolving community needs and priorities.

Action Plan

Implementation Matrix

Note to reader: The Implementation Matrix is currently under development. Information about this matrix is available below.

Successful implementation of St. Mary's 2050 requires coordination among county departments, state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, private sector partners, and property owners throughout the community. The implementation matrix will serve as a tool to monitor progress toward achieving the goals and policies outlined in St. Mary's 2050. This matrix will organize actions by

responsible departments or agencies, and establish initiation timeframes. County staff will reference this matrix during performance monitoring and the five-year implementation review to assess accomplishments and identify areas requiring additional attention or resources.

Sample of Implementation Matrix

A sample of the implementation matrix is shown in the table on the following page. For each action in this plan, the responsible departments and/or agencies and the timeframe will be identified.

Table 3: Implementation Matrix Sample

Number	Action	Department / Partners	Timeframe
Element Name Action Number	List action	Agency Name/s	Short-term Medium-term or Long-term
Element Name Action Number	List action	Agency Name/s	Short-term Medium-term or Long-term
Element Name Action Number	List action	Agency Name/s	Short-term Medium-term or Long-term

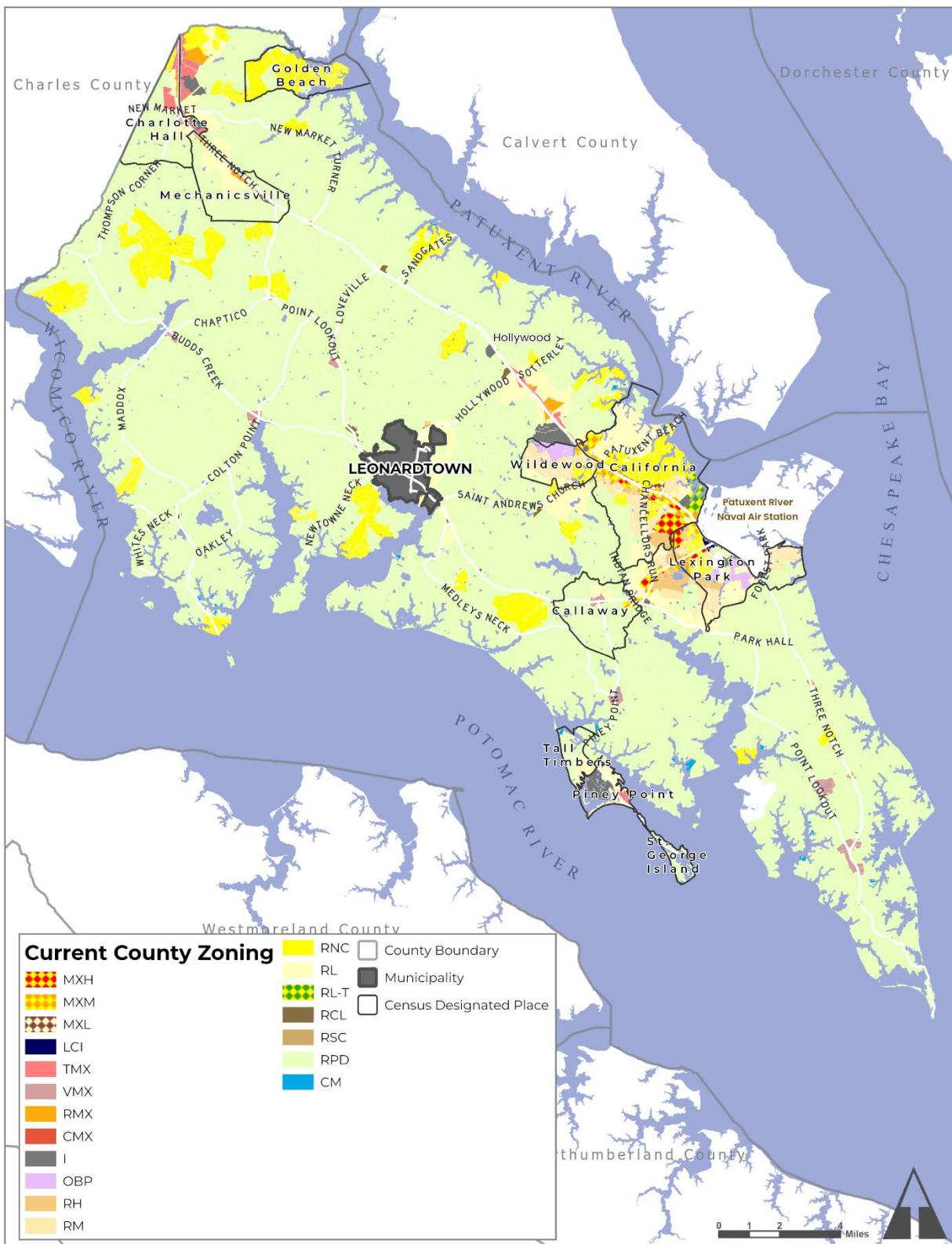
Development Regulations

Zoning ordinances regulate land use by dividing a jurisdiction into districts that specify permitted uses, development density, building standards, and other requirements. St. Mary's County's Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance establishes these controls to guide growth patterns, protect community character, and ensure health and safety objectives are upheld with new developments. Within each zoning district, certain uses are permitted by right, while others require special approval or are prohibited entirely.

Successful implementation of St. Mary's 2050 will require updates to the County's development regulations to ensure consistency between the Comprehensive Plan's vision and the zoning ordinance. As the Plan advances new policies related to housing diversity, sustainable growth, infrastructure coordination, and environmental protection, corresponding amendments to zoning standards, permitted uses, and development review procedures will be necessary.

Image to Be Added in After Public Review of the Draft

Figure 5: County Zoning Map



Appendix A: Glossary

In production (not available for public review)

Appendix B: Development Capacity Analysis

In production (not available for public review)

Appendix C: Water & Sewer Service Area Maps

In production (not available for public review)