

1988 Comprehensive Planning - Goals, Objectives and Policies

This document replaces the St. Mary's county comprehensive Land Use Plan which was adopted in 1974 and amended in 1978. Development trends since 1978 and renewed concern for the environment (most notably the Chesapeake Bay initiatives) have prompted a re-thinking of the county's policies and strategies for promoting the general health, safety and welfare through comprehensive planning. The presence of the Patuxent River Naval Test Center at Lexington Park and the Naval Electronic Test Facility at Webster Field at St. Inigoes have had a profound impact on the economy of St. Mary's County and are expected to do so for the foreseeable future. Most of the economic growth in recent years attributable to the presence of the naval complex has occurred in the form of white-collar, high-tech contractor firms in both the service and research and development sectors. This growth creates requirements for quality office and industrial space in the County. Employees of these businesses demand additional housing, private services and public services. While the naval presence in will continue to provide jobs and income to the area, efforts should be made to decrease reliance on this single industry and to diversify the economic base of the county. A diversified industrial base will provide more jobs for local residents and enable the county to be less susceptible to economic distress in an up and down economy. DECD has been working in recent years to assist naval contractor businesses with expansions of their businesses into fields that are less dependent on the Navy. The county is also attempting to diversify the economy through the attraction of other quality, clean base industries which would provide more blue-collar employment for county residents. Despite efforts to diversify, the county also recognizes the importance of maintaining a positive working relationship with the Navy. The county's economy is not diversified enough at this time to withstand a significant cutback of military or federal civilian employment or operations at these facilities. For the foreseeable future it is critical that St. Mary's County work in close cooperation with the Navy with regard to the effective operation of its facilities. It is clear that careful planning and good coordination between local government and growth linked to the Navy is required. All indications point to a continuing strong naval presence in the county, although absolute growth is likely to be less than has occurred since 1983.

It is the objective of this plan to trace recent trends, to analyze factors affecting future development, to assess the will and interests of the public regarding the future of county, and to establish a comprehensive plan which will direct development accordingly.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

This plan is designed to address both immediate and long-range (20- to 30-year) planning considerations for land use, transportation, community facilities and utilities. The objectives of the plan summarily include the following.

- Protection of farmland resources as components of both an important local industry and rural character.
- Protection of sensitive natural characteristics or environmental features.
- Protection and enhancement of the visual qualities and characteristics of existing settlements in the county.
- Directing and managing distribution of future land uses anticipated with a growth in population.

- Guiding of public investment in services, facilities, and improvements in a manner which is timely, cost effective and easily maintained.

As these objectives are implemented, the plan serves to inform county residents, the development community and state and federal agencies of the county's intent regarding its future. It identifies controls, management measures, financial or human resource investments and incentives necessary to achieving the objectives.

Finally, the plan serves not only as the basis for a number of legislative and administrative actions and management decisions, but as a "yardstick" for evaluating the merits of proposals which will surface over time. While it is impossible to anticipate all possible future occurrences and problems or opportunities which will arise, this plan provides guidance and establishes a basis for evaluating any development proposals which affect the quality of life.

By the year 2000 there will be 5,800 additional households in the county. The land area required to satisfy projected housing demand at lower densities (e.g., 3 units per acre) is substantially greater than higher densities (e.g., 5 units per acre). Therefore, providing selective areas for development at higher densities reduces the rate of conversion of farmland. This approach concurrently permits protection of natural resources and establishes more serviceable development areas. Concentration of development is needed to facilitate planning goals and objectives.

Land Use and Growth Management Policies

The Lexington Park and Leonardtown areas will be the primary location for much of the population and housing growth expected in the county during the planning period, and the TOWN CENTERS and VILLAGE CENTERS will accommodate a smaller portion of the expected growth. Given the greater growth pressures likely to occur in the 5th and 6th Election Districts, the settlements of Charlotte Hall, New Market and Mechanicsville are likely to grow at a greater rate than other settlements not located in northern areas of the county or along the Route 5/235 corridor.

In light of projected increases of 17,000 in population and 5,800 in households, timely and fairly financed provision of public facilities and services requires the following policies:

1. Future growth shall be concentrated in areas of the county already served or proposed to be served with public water and sewer, primarily the Lexington Park and Leonardtown areas.
2. Other areas of the county shall be designated generally for rural development and agriculture.
3. Existing crossroads villages shall provide services for surrounding rural and agriculture areas. Growth and further development of these villages shall respect their unique community and historic character.
4. Use of the county's abundant waterfront shall balance the important considerations of environmental protection and enhancement of the value of the waterfront as a resource for recreation.
5. Commercial uses shall be concentrated primarily in the Leonardtown and

Lexington Park areas, and secondarily in the TOWN CENTERS and VILLAGE CENTERS. A scattering of future commercial uses along the county's major roads shall be prohibited.

6. Future industrial and office uses shall locate in and near existing office and industrial areas in the Lexington Park and Leonardtown areas, near the airport and in the TOWN CENTERS.
7. Community service centers and facilities shall be concentrated in the Lexington Park and Leonardtown areas.
 - a. Passive parks and public open space may be established on sensitive environmental lands as a means of preserving them.

Policies:

- While DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS are more accommodating to building activity than other districts, natural resources and the generally rural character of the county remain important public values and shall be respected by new development.
- Visual and functional qualities of development shall be maintained through adherence to standards for landscaping, design, on-site advertising, access, lot coverage and open space, and buffering from adjacent developments and transportation corridors. New development areas shall be sufficiently large (at least ten acres) to accommodate such standards. Buffers shall be adequate to avoid conflicts between different land use types and to provide visual screening.
- DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS may receive development rights transferred from RURAL PRESERVATION DISTRICTS.
- Outlets to major roads shall be minimized. New development areas shall be located at intersections or otherwise provide access to two streets or shall share an access with an existing use.

Policies:

- Direct access to major highways shall be restricted. Secondary local and frontage roads shall be provided as needed to accommodate new uses.
- Outward expansion of TOWN CENTERS shall be limited to avoid conflict with surrounding land uses, particularly those in rural preservation areas

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Goals:

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- To restore and preserve the Bay and its tributaries and ecosystems.
- To restore, increase and maintain the harvest capacities of the Bay and its tributaries.
- To assure county watermen and other county residents a potential for income, a rural atmosphere and adequate recreational opportunities.

Policies:

Development within a NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT shall be limited to existing platted lots, i.e., outward expansion of such districts shall be discouraged.

Development within a NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION DISTRICT shall be limited in bulk, density and design to match existing characteristics.

Policies:

- Agricultural lands shall be maintained to the greatest extent possible.
- Negative impacts on agricultural activity which normally result from conflicting land uses while still allowing limited nonfarm development shall be avoided.
- Any farm use of land shall be permitted.
- Operation of farm machinery at any time shall be allowed.
- Normal agricultural activities and operation in accordance with good husbandry practices which do not cause bodily injury or directly endanger human health shall be permitted and preferred activities, including activities which may produce normal agriculturally related noise and odors.
- The sale of farm products produced on the farm where the sales are made shall be permitted.
- Supplemental income productive activities at a scale or intensity which will not unduly change the character of the area may be allowed; where these other activities are allowed there shall be performance standards which will prevent negative impacts on adjoining properties.
- Agriculture is a protective land use that shall be properly managed so that it minimizes its contribution to pollutant loading to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.
- Agricultural activities shall be in accordance with a soil and water conservation plan approved by the local Soil Conservation District.
- The creation of new agricultural lands shall not be accomplished through practices which are detrimental to water quality, plant and wildlife habitats, protected wetlands, forests, woodlands and other environmentally sensitive areas.
 - Best management practices shall be used in agricultural activities to minimize

contamination of surface and groundwater and adverse effects on plants, fish and wildlife resources, and other environmentally sensitive areas.

- Nonfarm residences shall be encouraged to locate away from tilled lands.
- Nonfarm residential development shall be limited in scale and consistent with the rural character of the area. Clustering shall be encouraged to maximize preservation of open space.

The goals of the law are 1) to minimize adverse impacts on water quality that result from high nutrient loadings in runoff from surrounding lands or from pollutants that are discharged from structures, 2) to conserve fish, wildlife, and plant habitats; and 3) to establish land use policies for development locating within the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area that accommodate growth and also address the fact that, even if pollution is controlled, the number, movement, and activities of persons in that area can create environmental impacts.

The critical area as an element of the land use plan categorizes all land use within the designated area and sets standards and restrictions for new developments therein. The categories and standards are consistent with the state laws described above and include resource conservations areas (RCA), limited development areas (LDA), and intensely developed areas (IDA). Standards and restrictions are likewise set for water dependent facilities, which may occur in any development category.

Policies:

- The overall ecological values at the critical area, its biological productivity and its diversity shall be conserved, protected and enhanced.
- Breeding, feeding, and wintering habitats for those wildlife populations that require the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, or coastal habitats in order to sustain populations of those species shall be protected.
- The land and water resource base that is necessary to maintain and support land uses such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries activities and aquaculture shall be conserved.
- Developed woodlands and forests shall be conserved or the water quality benefits that they provide.

LIMITED DEVELOPMENT AREAS

These are areas which are currently developed in low or moderate intensity uses. They also contain areas of natural plant and animal habitats, and the quality of runoff from these areas has not been substantially altered or impaired. These areas shall have at least one of the following features:

1. Housing density ranging from one dwelling unit per 5 acres up to four dwelling units per acre;
2. Areas not dominated by agriculture, wetland, forest, barren land, surface water, or open space;

3. Areas with characteristics of Intensely Developed Areas, but less than 20 acres in extent; and
4. Areas having public water or public sewer or both.

Policies:

- The quality of runoff and groundwater entering the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries shall be maintained or improved if possible.
- Natural habitats shall be maintained.
- Water quality, aquifer recharge areas, habitats, and the prevailing character of areas shall be protected when accommodating additional low or moderate intensity development.

Policies:

- The quality of runoff from developed areas that enters the Chesapeake Bay or its tributary streams shall be improved.
- Additional development of the type and intensity allowed by the comprehensive plan may be allowed provided that water quality is not impaired.
- The expansion of Intensely Developed Areas into portions of the critical area designated as habitat protection areas and Resource. conservation Areas shall be minimized.
- Fish, wildlife, and plant habitats shall be conserved.
- The use of retrofitting measures to address stormwater management problems shall be encouraged.
- Aquifer recharge areas shall be protected.

The locating of new Intensely Developed Areas and Limited Development Areas is subject to the following policies.

1. New Intensely Developed Areas and Limited Development Areas shall be located in Limited Development Areas or adjacent to existing Intensely Developed Areas.
2. New Limited Development Areas shall be located adjacent to existing Limited Development Areas or Intensely Developed Areas.
3. No more than one half of the allocated expansion, i.e., not more than 862 acres, may be located in Resource Conservation Areas.
4. The impacts of new Intensely Developed Areas and Limited Development Areas on habitat protection areas must be avoided or held to a minimum.
5. New Intensely Developed Areas shall be located where they minimize their impacts on the defined land uses of the Resource Conservation Area.

6. New Intensely Developed Areas and Limited Development Areas in the Resource Conservation Area shall be located at least 300 feet beyond the landward edge of tidal wetlands or tidal waters.

Policies:

- Development activities in the buffer shall be limited to those that are water dependent.
- Activities associated with water-dependent facilities shall have minimal individual and cumulative impact on water quality and fish, wildlife and plant habitat.

Limited Development Areas shall be located at least of tidal wetlands or tidal?

Policies:

- Development activities in the buffer shall be limited to those that are water dependent.
- Activities associated with water-dependent facilities shall have minimal individual and cumulative impact on water quality and fish, wildlife and plant habitat.
- Consistent with the environmental concerns expressed herein:
 - Expansion of marina services to meet the water-dependent commercial and recreational needs and developmental goals of the county shall be encouraged.
 - Expansion of fisheries activities to enhance markets for local watermen shall be encouraged.
 - New investment in aquaculture, maintenance of existing aquacultural activities, and restoration of overworked areas shall be encouraged.

Policies:

The County should establish a local Agricultural Preservation Program modeled upon the State's program in order to purchase development rights from farmland owners. This local program would be funded through a development tax to be used solely for this purpose.

- Agricultural lands shall be maintained to the greatest extent possible.
- Negative impacts on agricultural activity which normally result from conflicting land uses while still allowing limited nonfarm development shall be avoided.
- Any farm use of land shall be permitted.
- Operation of farm machinery at any time shall be allowed.
- Normal agricultural activities and operation in accordance with good husbandry practices which do not cause bodily injury or directly endanger human health shall be permitted and preferred activities, including activities which may produce normal agriculturally related noise and odors.

- The sale of farm products produced on the farm where the sales are made shall be permitted.
- Supplemental income productive activities at a scale or intensity which will not unduly change the character of the area may be allowed. When these other activities are allowed there shall be performance standards which will prevent negative impacts on adjoining properties.
- Agriculture is a protective land use that shall be properly maintained so that it minimizes its contribution to pollutant loadings to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.
- Agricultural activities shall be in accordance with a soil and conservation water quality plan approved by the local Soil Conservation District.
- The creation of new agricultural lands shall not be accomplished through practices which are detrimental to water quality, plant and wildlife habitats, protected wetlands, forests, woodlands and other environmentally sensitive areas.
- Best management practices shall be used in agricultural activities to minimize contamination of surface and groundwater and on plants, fish and wildlife resources, and other environmentally sensitive areas.
- Non-farm residences shall be encouraged to locate away from tilled lands.
- Nonfarm residential development shall be limited in scale and consistent with the rural character of the area. Clustering shall be encouraged to maximize preservation of open space.

More than 150 sites and structures in the county have been identified as having significant historic values and should be preserved for the benefit of current and future generations. An historic conservation district has been designated on the land use plan map for the St. Mary's City area to restrict development to only those uses and activities which are compatible with the character of that area, but the following policies apply to the entire county.

Policies:

- Significant and important historic sites, properties and structures shall be preserved and promoted.
- The adaptive reuse of historic structures for public and private uses shall be promoted.

The following are the general policies for protecting natural resources:

- Forest cover shall be maintained and enhanced to maintain biological productivity and habitat values.
- Impacts on water quality that result from pollutants that are discharged from structures or conveyances that have runoff from surrounding lands shall be minimized.

- Fish, wildlife, and plant habitat shall be preserved.
- Available agricultural land shall be preserved where appropriate.
- Agricultural lands shall be managed to minimize non-point source pollution.
- Natural habitats shall be conserved.
- The impacts of agriculture and forestry activities on water quality shall be minimized.
- Protection measures shall be directed toward protecting receiving waters by limiting point sources of pollution into the bays through storm water, sanitary sewer or other outfalls.
- The impact of non-point sources of pollution including runoff and failed septic system effluent shall be limited or mitigated.
- Land treatment of sewage effluent shall be encouraged wherever feasible.

WETLANDS

The county has approximately 4,176 acres of tidal wetlands, and 760 acres of submerged aquatic vegetation. Tidal and nontidal wetlands are valuable areas for fish and wildlife habitat, are vital to the maintenance of water quality in adjacent or downstream waters, and provide flood control benefits. Their protection is therefore of public interest.

Policies:

- Alteration or obstruction of or construction in existing stream courses and stream banks shall be discouraged to reduce the potential associated water quality impacts.
- Best management practices shall be employed to minimize potential associated water quality impacts when development activity takes place adjacent to stream banks.
- Alteration of the natural drainage patterns shall be discouraged unless adequate measures to mitigate potential adverse impacts are included in the development.
- Intense development activity shall be directed away from areas which are in proximity to water courses.
- On sites with water features development shall be encouraged to locate as far from the water courses as possible.
- The establishment of natural preserves, parks and education areas adjacent to water courses is encouraged.

FLOOD PLAINS

Flood plains are by definition subject to periodic flooding. They are broadly defined by alluvial soils laid down during past inundations. Buildings can normally only be safely built upon them if specific engineering works such as dikes or levees are constructed to obviate the problem.

Disturbance of the floodplain through filling and development can result in increased hazards to human health, safety and welfare and increased water pollution from runoff and erosion of slopes and stream banks. In St. Mary's county, the 100-year flood plains are concentrated along the major stream corridors and southern tip of the peninsula bordered by the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay.

Policies:

- Development in the 100-year flood plain shall be restricted.
- The disturbance of vegetation in the 100-year flood plain shall be minimized.

FORESTS AND WOODLANDS

Less than fifty percent of the county is covered by forest. Forests are protective land uses which provide significant water quality and wildlife habitat benefits, and their protection is of public interest. Innovative woodland management is recognized as a valuable means of preserving the benefits of forest resources and shall be encouraged.

Policies:

- Forest and woodland cover shall be recognized as a protective land use and shall be managed so that maximum values for wildlife, water quality, timber, recreation and other resources can be maintained, recognizing that in some cases these uses may be mutually exclusive.
- Forests and managed woodlands shall be conserved, and expansion of forested areas, particularly in the critical area, shall be encouraged.
- The removal of trees associated with development activities shall be minimized, and, where appropriate, the impacts of tree removal shall be mitigated. Forested vegetation of the critical area, and, where possible, throughout the county shall be maintained or increased.

MINERAL RESOURCES

Sand and gravel are the abundant minerals found in the county. These important raw materials support the local paving and construction industries and activities. As of 1986 there were 71 sand and gravel pits in operation. Although these resources contribute significantly to the county's economy, mining operations, if not properly managed, can result in sedimentation and other adverse impacts on aquatic resources.

Policies:

- While surface mining represents an important economic value in the county, activities associated with resource extraction, including the removal of vegetation and soil disturbance and grading, are generally contrary to the concept of the critical area because of potential water quality impacts. In addition, the areas of potential lowland

and upland resources in the critical area represent only a fraction of the rather extensive areas throughout the remainder of the county. For these reasons, the undeveloped lands with potential resources in the critical area shall be kept in an undeveloped state. However, surface mining activities involving not more than an acre may be allowed in the critical area.

- Outside of the critical area sand and gravel excavation may occur when negative physical and visual impacts to adjoining properties are avoided or mitigated.

STEEP LANDS

Although the majority of the county has very little gradient (slopes are generally less than 10percent), there are places where slopes exceed 15 percent. The topography of the area between Three Notch Road and the Patuxent River is more varied than that of the rest of the county, and slopes in excess of 15 percent are common. Wherever steep slopes occur there are limitations to human activity, and especially is building development in need of careful management in such areas. To protect the overall quality of the natural and human environments, prohibit building development on slopes in excess of 25 percent, and the limitation of development on slopes in excess of 15 percent are in the best interest of the general public.

Policies:

- Development shall be discouraged on steep slopes of 15% or more to avoid the potential associated water quality impacts that development on steep slopes has unless there is no viable alternative.
- Where development does occur on steep slopes (15 % or greater) the clearing of natural vegetation shall be minimized, and the best available technology used to control erosion and sedimentation to reduce and/or mitigate the potential associated water quality impacts.
- Development shall be prohibited on slopes greater than 25 percent.

SOILS

Of value as a resource are those soils that are well suited for the production of agricultural products and those with few limitations for building development. Some soils have a high potential for either water or wind erosion and some have a high runoff potential. Another limitation of soil on building development is the capacity to accommodate on-site sewage disposal systems. Lot sizes and overall densities must be carefully tailored to the restrictions of the soils to avoid negative impacts both on-site and to adjoining properties.

Policy:

The quality of water resources shall be enhanced and protected through controlling and minimizing soil erosion and runoff to the maximum extent possible on all lands in the county.

HABITAT RESOURCES

The waters off of the county peninsula have large areas of open oyster bars. Anadromous fish (species that primarily live in the ocean but travel upstream to fresh water to spawn) and semi-anadromous fish spawn in many of the county watercourses. Bald eagle nests have been found in several places in the county. A Sedge Wren habitat has been identified by the Maryland Natural Heritage Program at Marsh Point. The Carroll Pond peat bog is Maryland's largest area of unmined coastal peatland.

Policies:

- Because of their importance as plant habitat, fish and wildlife habitat, and overall water quality, tidal and nontidal wetlands resources shall be protected.
- Potentially harmful or toxic substances in runoff entering the Bay and its tributaries shall be removed or reduced.
- The adverse effects of lines, stream banks, shall be minimized human activities on wetlands, shore tidal waters, and aquatic resources
- Area of transitional habitat between aquatic and upland communities shall be maintained.
- The natural environment of streams shall be maintained

SHORELINE EROSION

The majority of shoreline erosion along the St. Mary's coastline has been slight or low based on the historic erosion rates mapped by the Maryland Geological Survey. The major areas of moderate erosion have occurred mostly on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay between Carroll Pond and Point No Point, with scattered stretches around the southern tip of the County to Piney Point Creek. Limited areas of high shoreline erosion are scattered from Cedar Point South around the southern tip of the County to Smith creek. These areas indicate generally the locations where structural approaches to control shore erosion will be required.

Policies:

- The protection of rapidly eroding portions of the shoreline in the Resource Protection Area by public and private landowners is encouraged.
- Where such measures can effectively and practically reduce or prevent shore erosion, the use of non-structural shore protection measures in order to conserve and protect plant, fish, and wildlife habitat shall be encouraged.