

# QUALITY OF LIFE IN ST. MARY'S COUNTY – A STRATEGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY –



**ADOPTED FEBRUARY 19, 2002**

A Comprehensive Plan  
in accordance with  
Article 66B of the  
Annotated Code of Maryland

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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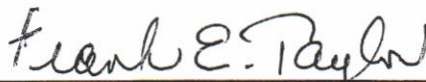
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**ATTESTED AND CERTIFIED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

In accordance with §3.07 of Article 66B of the  
Annotated Code of Maryland



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Frank E. Taylor, Chairman  
December 10, 2001

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MISSION STATEMENT**

St. Mary's County Government will:

- be responsive and accountable to the county's citizens;
- provide high quality, cost effective and efficient services;
- preserve the county's environment, heritage and rural character; and
- foster opportunities for present and future generations.

**Authority**

This comprehensive plan has been prepared and adopted pursuant to Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland as amended by the 1992 Economic Growth, Resource Preservation and Planning Act and by the 1997 "Smart Growth" initiatives. Specific elements mandated by the Maryland Code are included herein beginning at the section indicated below.

<u>Element</u>	<u>Plan Reference</u>	<u>66 B Reference</u>
<u>Goals and Objectives</u>	Chapter IV	3.05 (a)(1)(i)
<u>Land Use</u>	Chapter IV, Section 1	3.05 (a)(1)(ii)
<u>Transportation, including provisions for bicycles ways</u>	Chapter IV, Section 3.1.2.B	3.05 (a)(1)(iii)
<u>Community Facilities</u>	Chapter IV, Section 3	3.05 (a)(1)(iv)
<u>Mineral Resources</u>	Chapter IV, Section 2.1.2.B.v	3.05 (a)(1)(v)
<u>Land Development Regulations</u>	Chapter V	3.05 (a)(1)(vi)
<u>Sensitive Areas</u>	Chapter IV, Section 2.2	3.05 (a)(1)(vii) and (viii)
<u>Provisions for Fisheries</u>	Chapter IV, Sections 2.1.2.A.i.c. and 5.3.4	3.05 (a)(5)
<u>Economic Development</u>	Chapter IV, Section 5	3.05 (a)(1):(ii) and (vi)3.
<u>Interjurisdictional Coordination</u>	Chapter IV, Section 6	3.01(b), 3.05(a),3.06(a), 3.07, 3.09

This plan also complies with the Maryland Code by incorporating the eight visions as set forth under Article 66B. The reader will find that the structure of this plan closely follows those visions.

In addition to gleaning guidance directly from Article 66B, this draft plan incorporates concepts, strategies and recommended policies from:

- St. Mary's County Board of County Commissioners;
- St. Mary's County Planning Commission (and its ad hoc Community Character Committee);
- St. Mary's County Board of Appeals;

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- County and state Agencies;
- 1974 and 1988 Comprehensive Plans (many concepts and implementation strategies are still valid);
- Relevant legislation (Critical Area Law, Forest Conservation Law, 1997 "Smart Growth" amendments to Article 66B);
- 1988-1995 annual reports of the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners;
- Economic Development Commission (1995 Strategic Plan);
- Statewide Tributary Strategies Program (Patuxent and the Lower Potomac Tributary Teams);
- 1979 Patuxent River Policy Plan
- 1996 Patuxent River Watershed Demonstration Project;
- Sensitive Areas Plan Element and Mapping (1994 and 1995 Coastal Zone Management grant efforts);
- Southern Maryland Heritage Plan (endorsed by the Board of County Commissioners in October 1996);
- Findings and recommendations of the 1996 Wicomico Scenic River Countryside Stewardship Exchange.

Specific and general input was received from county citizens by the listed commissions and was solicited directly by the Department of Planning and Zoning through the use of surveys, questionnaires and at workshops, citizen information forums, and during presentations to numerous citizen organizations



## Executive Summary

### *A COMMUNITY VISION:*

Preserve and enhance the quality of life by recognizing and protecting the unique character of St. Mary's County as a rural Chesapeake Bay peninsula. Foster economic growth and create an atmosphere of excellence by focusing and managing growth to create vibrant, attractive communities, by protecting the rural character and economy of the countryside, by nurturing the shoreline and adjacent waters and by preserving and capitalizing on the other natural resources and historical quality of the county.

This plan has been prepared in response to the interest of the residents of St. Mary's County in achieving this vision. It also satisfies legal requirements of Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland as amended to include, among other things, the 1992 Economic Growth, Resource Protection and Planning Act and the various components of Maryland's "Smart Growth, initiatives. It continues and strengthens those goals and objectives of its 1988 and 1999 predecessors insofar as they remain valued by the citizens of St. Mary's County as they contribute to achieving its community vision.

Citizen input and public opinion played a large role in the planning process. For the most part the opinions given reinforce what was stated or suggested in 1994 at a "visual preference" workshop. In response to a citizen survey, some of the responses given to the question "What issues do you believe should be addressed in the comprehensive plan?" included: maintaining rural character, clustering growth, aesthetics, more focus on people less on cars, agricultural land preservation, breaking up of farmland and open space, and transferable development rights (TDRs). Many of these issues were repeated under a separate survey question which asked citizens to rate the quality of services in the county. Transportation, agricultural preservation, and rural preservation all received a high number of poor ratings.

The county has been successful in directing the majority of new high-density residential and nonresidential development to the designated development districts, but increased efforts toward directing other types of development there is needed. Some strides toward land preservation have been made, but significant protection of farmlands as an economic component of rural character has *not* occurred. Application of the implementation strategies of the 1999 Plan, particularly the establishment of density in the Rural Preservation District at one dwelling unit per three acres, has shown that they have not achieved and are probably incapable of achieving the goal of preservation of open space. Protection of land for agriculture and resource utilization will not occur without additional strategies to guide how that density is located, how it functions and "looks" in the landscape.

Major expenditures on capital facilities since 1999 have been concentrated in designated growth areas. However, designated growth areas are larger than projected development needs dictate, and the 1999 plan provided little or no guidance for sequencing improvements and services within those areas. It did suggest some reduction of these development areas based on the mandated sensitive area considerations and on the projected "build out" needed to accommodate new growth.

This plan proposes several "win-win" initiatives intended to guide growth and to preserve natural, cultural and economic characteristics of value to the community's citizens, while attempting to equitably assess the cost of growth against the benefit. The plan also proposes to address the equity value inherent in landowners' holdings by providing economic options to preserve natural areas and lands of high productive value. The plan directs citizen and

government action within the context of the community vision and within the context of the visions of the state legislation (Article 66B): 1. Development is concentrated in suitable areas. 2. In rural areas growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected. 3. Sensitive areas are protected. 4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic. 5. Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption is practiced. 6. Economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined. 7. Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the county are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur. 8. Funding is available to achieve these Visions.

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## Introduction

This growth opportunity plan is about the county's past almost as much as it is about its future. It is about where we have come from as a community of people and what that means for where we are to go as new growth pressures us toward an increasingly (sub)urban future. St. Mary's County celebrated its 366<sup>th</sup> birthday and Lexington Park its 57<sup>th</sup> birthday at the turn of the century. What do the next five, ten, 20 or even 50 years hold for us, our children, and grandchildren? Will we be able to preserve those things of value that new and long time residents alike cherish about St. Mary's County? This plan describes a desired future and charts a realistic and viable means of reaching it. Planning is and plans are more than trying to predict a future land use pattern; the effort at hand is to assess the quality of our living environment and to fashion policy that will preserve and enhance the quality of life for current and future residents, workers, and visitors.

The county's first county commissioner adopted plan in 1974 was largely unchanged until a new plan was adopted in 1988. All counties and municipalities then updated and revised their plans as necessary to conform to the requirements of the Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act (hereafter "The Planning Act") enacted in 1992 by the Maryland Legislature and subsequently incorporated into Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland. In 1999 the county commissioners adopted a comprehensive plan to build upon the successes and positive components of the 1988 plan and to revise provisions which did not fulfill the specified requirements. This plan has been prepared to continue such building and to comply with further updates of state legislation, including "Smart Growth" initiatives.

State legislation prescribes eight visions of Smart Growth: 1. Development is concentrated in suitable areas. 2. In rural areas growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected. 3. Sensitive areas are protected. 4. Stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic. 5. Conservation of resources, including a reduction in resource consumption is practiced. 6. Economic growth is encouraged and regulatory mechanisms are streamlined; and 7. Adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the county are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur. 8. Funding is available to achieve these VISIONS. This plan also complies with state legislated requirements to 1) identify sensitive areas and develop programs to ensure the protection of the natural environment as a plan element 2) ensure interjurisdictional cooperation and coordination of various programs, and 3) provide for forest conservation, mineral resource management and fishery operations, administrative amendments, adaptive reuse, etc.

A comprehensive plan is not just a land use analysis and projection, but also deals with many issues which affect quality of life in the community, such as water supply, traffic congestion, and education. In addressing such diverse topics, any one document would gloss over important concepts; therefore, many other functional and geographic plans must be and are coordinated with the overall comprehensive plan. A comprehensive water and sewerage plan directs the provision of these public facilities, while a solid waste management plan advises public policy on matters of trash disposal. The county commissioners have adopted a Land Preservation and Recreation Plan, a Wicomico Scenic River Management Plan, an Airport Master Plan, and a School Facilities Master Plan. Several geographic plans are under review or in preparation, such as the Lexington Park-Tulagi Place Master Plan, and watershed management plans for the St. Mary's River and McIntosh Run. Tributary strategies are emerging throughout the Chesapeake watershed, and in this effort St. Mary's County is participating in the preparation of strategies for the Lower Potomac, the Lower Western Shore, and the Patuxent River. The county has endorsed the 1996 Southern Maryland Heritage Plan.

This plan is more than a statement of the county's public policy. It is a plan for the involvement of the community in charting that public policy. The participation of the public and the expression of citizen perceptions about the condition of the county has been crucial component of the planning process used to develop this plan. The St. Mary's County Planning