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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Planning Commission of St. Mary's County  
**FROM:** Department of Land Use and Growth Management (LUGM) and Clarion Associates  
**DATE:** June 22, 2026  
**RE:** Memo #1 - Requested Changes to the Public Hearing Draft

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*This memorandum describes the proposed changes to the Public Hearing Draft of the Comprehensive Plan that have been requested by departments of the St. Mary's County government for Planning Commission consideration. The Public Hearing Draft, published to the County website in May, adjusted the initial Public Review Draft in response to feedback from public engagement, the Planning Commission, and the Commissioners of St. Mary's County.*

*The Public Hearing Draft consists of 10 chapters (e.g. Growth Management, Economic Development, etc.). Requests are organized by chapter. For each request, the associated page number of the Public Hearing Draft, the rationale for the change, the requesting entity, and the requested change are listed.*

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1. Update Phase 4 Description

*Pages 4-5*

Rationale: The initial text included here was intended to be a placeholder for the Public Review Draft from February, since that draft was shared before phase 4 had begun. For the final draft, it is recommended to replace the placeholder text with text describing the components of phase 4.

~~*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.~~

The final phase of the project included formal adoption through structured review and public hearings conducted by the Planning Commission and the Commissioners of St. Mary's County. This phase included public hearings providing opportunities for final public comment and official action.

Requested by: Department of Land Use and Growth Management (LUGM)

## 2. Update CEW #3 Description

Page 8

Rationale: The initial text included here was intended to be a placeholder for the Public Review Draft from February, since that draft was shared during Community Engagement Window #3. For the final draft, it is recommended to replace the placeholder text with a brief description of the events and activities of 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.~~

Community Engagement Window #3 took place in February and March of 2026. At 11 open house-style events and through an online engagement portal, participants evaluated the draft goals of the plan, gave feedback on the draft Land Use Map, and shared their thoughts about the future of land use, growth, and economic opportunity in the county.

Requested by: Department of Land Use and Growth Management (LUGM)

## Chapter 6: Transportation Element

### 3. Restore the Ferry-Related Goals, Policies, and Actions

Page 128

The Department of Economic Development (DED) is concerned that eliminating all references to the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry may be interpreted as St. Mary's County is no longer interested in evaluating the opportunity or participating in regional conversations regarding its future. Such an interpretation would be inconsistent with prior actions and may cause confusion among project partners and stakeholders who have invested significant effort in the initiative. For additional information, see

**Attachment 1**, Advanced Memorandum, dated June 12, 2026, and Attachments A and B from Cindy Greb, the Director of the Department of Economic Development (DED).

Requested by: Department of Economic Development (DED)

## Errata

*The corrections below are for typos and clerical errors.*

### 4. Planning Areas Map

*Page 26*

An outdated boundary for the Leonardtown Development District was used in the previous map that did not reflect several annexations by the Town of Leonardtown and, as a result, omitted areas southwest of Leonardtown. It is important to note that the Leonardtown Development District includes adjacent unincorporated areas that are designated for growth and development. As the Town of Leonardtown continues to grow and develop, additional annexations are anticipated. The previous map also included Census Designated Places (CDPs) to help give locational context, but the CDPs have been removed to enhance readability. See **Attachment 2**, Planning Areas Map for the corrections.

Requested by: Department of Land Use and Growth Management (LUGM)

### 5. Land Use Map

*Page 29*

Map colors have been updated to conform more closely with standard color protocols of the American Planning Association ([source 1](#), [source 2](#)) and to improve the contrast between colors. The boundary of the Leonardtown Development District has been added so that both Development Districts are now shown on the Land Use Map. Finally, the previous map also included Census Designated Places (CDPs) to help give locational context, but the CDPs have been removed to enhance readability. See **Attachment 3**, Planning Areas Map for the corrections.

Requested by: Department of Land Use and Growth Management (LUGM)

**Attachment 1, ADVANCE MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Planning Commission for St. Mary's County  
David Weiskopf, County Administrator

**Cc:** Jessica Andritz, Director, Land Use & Growth Management

**FROM:** Cynthia Greb, Director

**REGARDING:** **Request for Consideration of Reinstating Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry References in the St. Mary's 2050 Comprehensive Plan**

**DATE:** June 12, 2026

**Summary of Request:** The Department of Economic Development (DED) respectfully requests that the Planning Commission consider reinstating the same references to the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry (CBPF) initiative that were included in the February 2026 Public Review Draft of the St. Mary's 2050 Comprehensive Plan and subsequently removed after discussions by the Commissioners of St. Mary's County in late April 2026.

The purpose of this request is not to advocate for a commitment to construct, fund, or operate a ferry service, but rather to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan accurately acknowledges the County's continued involvement in evaluating a regional transportation, tourism, and economic development opportunity that has been the subject of coordinated planning, stakeholder engagement, and intergovernmental collaboration for more than four years.

**Historical/Background Information:** The Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry initiative originated in 2022 as a regional effort involving multiple Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions, tourism organizations, transportation agencies, and economic development partners. Since that time, St. Mary's County has been an active participant through both the Department of Economic Development and other County-supported planning efforts.

Significant milestones include:

- May 2022 – The Commissioners of St. Mary's County supported participation in a passenger ferry feasibility study and agreed in principle to contribute toward the required local match.
- January 2023 – The Commissioners adopted the 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which identified improved transportation connectivity, including consideration of ferry access, as a strategy to increase mobility and economic opportunity.
- February 2024 – DED provided an update to the Commissioners regarding the evaluation of passenger ferry service as a means of stimulating economic growth,

improving transportation options, and enhancing tourism opportunities throughout the region.

- March 2024 and September 2025 – The Commissioners approved MDOT Transportation Priority Letters that included the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Project.
- June 2025 – The Calvert-St. Mary's Metropolitan Planning Organization approved funding within its Unified Planning Work Program for implementation planning associated with the ferry initiative.

In addition, St. Mary's County has participated in the Chesapeake Bayways and Gateways Destination Assessment, a multi-county tourism and destination development initiative involving state, federal, and regional partners. Numerous local stakeholders, tourism organizations, municipalities, and regional jurisdictions have participated in the planning process related to the ferry concept and its potential economic and tourism benefits.

**Summary Information:** The February 2026 Public Review Draft of the Comprehensive Plan included three ferry-related goals and associated policies addressing:

- Economic development and tourism opportunities associated with passenger ferry service.
- Regional connectivity and inter-county collaboration.
- Evaluation of future ferry implementation and supporting infrastructure.

These sections recognized the potential role of water transportation as one component of a broader transportation, tourism, and economic development strategy. The language acknowledged opportunities for regional collaboration and future evaluation but did not constitute approval of a specific project, route, funding commitment, or operational plan.

The references were subsequently removed from the draft plan following discussion by the Commissioners. DED understands the Planning Commission later supported the removal; however, it is our understanding that the Commission may not have been provided the full history of County participation, prior planning actions, and regional commitments associated with the initiative.

DED believes complete removal of all references may unintentionally create the impression that St. Mary's County is no longer interested in evaluating the concept or participating in ongoing regional discussions. Such a perception may be inconsistent with previous County actions and could create confusion among project partners and stakeholders who have invested significant time and resources in the initiative.

**Previous Board Priorities, Objectives, Actions and/or Direction:** The Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry initiative has been supported through several previous actions and planning efforts, including:

- Acceptance of the 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, which identified ferry access as a transportation and mobility consideration.
- Approval of Transportation Priority Letters submitted to the Maryland Department of Transportation that included the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Project.

- Participation in regional ferry planning efforts through the Calvert-St. Mary's Metropolitan Planning Organization.
- Support for regional tourism and destination development initiatives through the Chesapeake Bayways and Gateways Destination Assessment.
- Continued participation in inter-county collaboration efforts involving Anne Arundel, Calvert, Queen Anne's, Somerset, and other Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions.

**Formal Request:** The Department of Economic Development respectfully requests that the Planning Commission consider reinstating appropriate references to the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry initiative within the St. Mary's County Comprehensive Plan 2050. DED is not requesting language that commits the County to construction, funding, operation, or implementation of a ferry service. Rather, DED requests that the Comprehensive Plan acknowledge the County's participation in ongoing regional discussions and planning efforts related to water transportation, regional connectivity, tourism development, and economic opportunity.

Attachment A documents the County's four-year history of participation in the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry initiative, including actions by the Commissioners of St. Mary's County, the Calvert-St. Mary's Metropolitan Planning Organization, regional tourism organizations, and other public partners.

Attachment B provides the original ferry-related goals, policies, and actions contained within the February 2026 Public Review Draft of the Comprehensive Plan.

At a minimum, DED recommends restoring limited policy language recognizing the County's continued evaluation of passenger ferry opportunities and participation in regional transportation initiatives. Such language would accurately reflect previous County actions, maintain consistency with existing planning efforts, and preserve flexibility for future policymakers while avoiding any commitment to project implementation.

DED appreciates the Planning Commission's consideration of this request and is available to provide additional background information or supporting documentation as needed.

**Attachments:**

Attachment A: Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Project Timeline and County Actions (2022–2026)

Attachment B: Original Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Goals, Policies, and Actions Included in the February 2026 Public Review Draft of the St. Mary's County Comprehensive Plan 2050 and Removed from the April 2026 Draft

**DED Attachment A**

**Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Project Timeline and Support:**

**April 5, 2022**-Calvert/St. Mary's MPO made LUGM aware of the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry (CBPF) Project.

**April 21, 2022**-\*Ferry Consortium is formed. Regular meetings begin and continue over the next four years.

**May 17, 2022**-CSMC send a letter indicating agreement in principle, with a passenger ferry feasibility study and a commitment of an equal portion of the matching requirement, not to exceed \$25,000.

**August 23, 2022**-Memorandum sent to the CSMC advising of the Bayways Destination Assessment (Phase 2 described in 5.17.22 CSMC item).

**January 24, 2023**-CSMC accept St. Mary's CEDS 2022 with the recommendation for improved transportation to increase mobility to, from, and within the county, to include consideration of adding ferry access for recreation, commercial, and transit.

**October 30, 2024**-Kick-off meeting for Chesapeake Bayways and Gateways Destination Assessment in partnership with the National Park Service. Funded by the MD Department of Commerce-Office of Tourism & Film, and the US Department of Commerce EDA ARP: Travel, Tourism, & Outdoor Recreation Program.

**February 13, 2024**-DED provided an update to CSMC on the evaluation of the potential for a new passenger ferry service that could stimulate economic growth within each host community, provide improved access to the Bay, provide new water transportation connectivity options, and promote enhanced tourism opportunities throughout the region.

**February 14, 2024** -DED request to LUGM that support of CBPF language be added to county plans.

**March 12, 2024**-CSMC approve the FY 2025 MDOT Transportation Priority Letter including, the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Project to establish a high-speed and long-range electric ferry (shuttle ship) between numerous ports along the Chesapeake Bay. (Attachment C)

**May 29, 2024**-DED wrote a letter of support to the USDOT for Anne Arundel's successful grant request from the Federal Transit Administration Electric or Low-Emitting Ferry Pilot Program to start two ferry routes.

**August 15, 2024**-DED, along with representatives from Anne Arundel, Calvert, Queen Anne, and Somerset County presented the CBPF final report at MACO Summer Conference: standing room only with CSMC in attendance.

**December 3, 2024** – DED and VSMMD began regular meetings with Calvert, Somerset, and St. Mary's to develop Route 5 of the ferry system.

**January 28 – January 30, 2025**-DED and VSMMD attended Chesapeake Bayways Destination Assessment conference.

**June 12, 2025**- CALVERT ST. MARY'S METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION approved the UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM FY 2026 including funding for the Calvert and St. Mary's - Ferry Study Implementation Plan (\$64,000 Federal/\$8,000 MDOT). With Commissioner Alderson voting in support.

**September 3 – 4, 2025** DED presented the CBPF Implementation plan at a meeting in Queen Anne for the Chesapeake Bayways and Gateways Action Plan Update

**September 30, 2025**-CSMC approve the FY 2026 MDOT Transportation Priority Letter including, the Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Project to establish a high-speed and long-range electric ferry (shuttle ship) between numerous ports along the Chesapeake Bay.

**October 15, 2025** – DED & VSMMD started regular engagement with Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail at roundtables and community meetings for coordination of trail activity and CBPF.

**DED Attachment B**

## **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 (Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry 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.

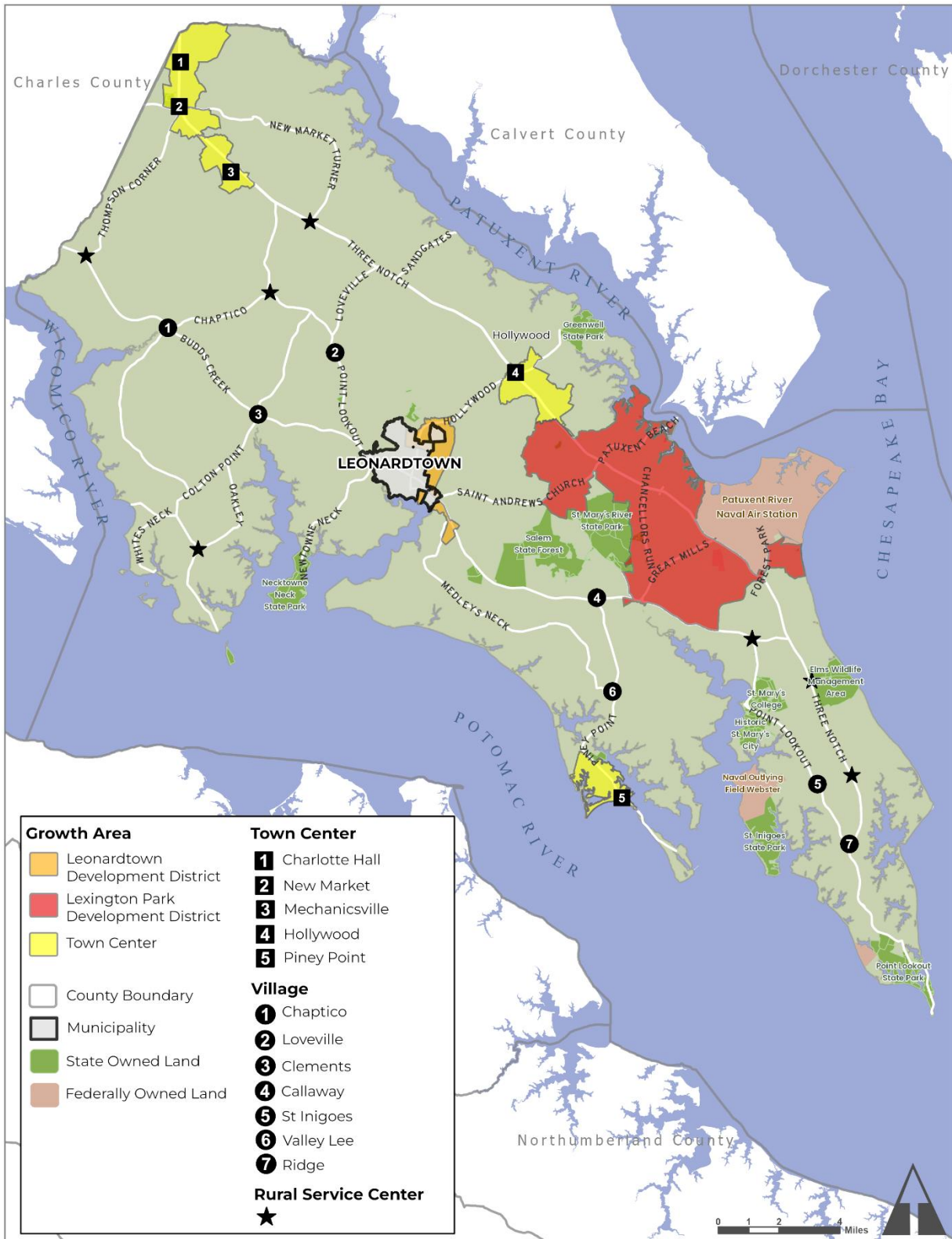
### Action 18.3.2: Create a Capital Improvement Plan

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.

## Attachment 2, Planning Areas Map



**Attachment 3, Land Use Map**

