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# Chapter 13 Community Design and Appearance

## I. Vision

Talbot County, through application of its design standards, continues to project the image of a rural but sophisticated region – proud of its legacy and anxious to protect its future with sound and decisive action. Higher density residential development, out of scale with the small town and rural surroundings, is directed toward designated growth areas. Traditional neighborhood development building patterns, more suitable in already built up areas, are not located outside of our towns and villages. Standards that guide community appearance and building design are in place protecting the integrity of our rural identity.

The visual pollution caused by earlier strip developments is being mitigated through buffering and intensive landscaping. Utility lines are being buried to enhance the pastoral rural views along our highways and byways; and signage design standards emphasize proper scale and appearance that is harmonious with the overall character of the area.

Land use policies that focus growth within the town boundaries and design standards that characterize the region significantly contribute to the objective of preserving open space. These standards make Talbot County a model of superior community appearance and design.

### **GOAL**

*Design development to preserve and enhance the appearance and Rural Character of Talbot County.*

## II. Introduction

Managing the design of new development to enhance community appearance is an important goal of the Comprehensive Plan for Talbot County. Development design guidelines significantly affect real estate values, community pride, a sense of obligation to private property, personal enjoyment and satisfaction, and the overall investment and development climate in Talbot County.

Chapter 3 (Land Use) describes the present and future land uses for each planning area, while this chapter (Chapter 13.) presents the policies, guidelines and general standards for development in the planning areas.

This chapter includes the specific policies and implementation strategies that encourage innovative building design and site planning, while ensuring that certain universal principles of good community design are reinforced. Some of the implementation strategies recommend changes to existing site development ordinances and standards, other strategies suggest ways to preserve the Rural Character of the County by controlling the form and pattern of future development in rural areas.

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### III. Community Design and Appearance Guidelines

Talbot County has development in a traditional pattern of farms interspersed with small settlements, villages, towns and waterfront oriented residential areas in the western portion of the county. Maintaining this traditional pattern is important to protecting land for agricultural and open space, and conserving the fragile environmental resources.

#### **Countywide Community Design Policies**

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- C13.P. 1. The County should preserve its unique rural landscape through conservation of farmland, forestlands, and environmentally sensitive lands by application of land use regulations and easement programs that conserve open space in rural areas.
- C13.P. 2. Encourage site, signage, and landscape designs that complement the scale and character of existing and planned development.
- C13.P. 3. Require development for which site plan approval is required to address the policies and standards of the Community Design and Appearance guidelines.
- C13.P. 4. New development and redevelopment in village centers should be compatible with the existing character of the village in terms of land use, density, scale, setbacks, site layout and general design.
- C13.P. 5. Strip development along County and State roads shall be prohibited in order to preserve scenic rural views.
- C13.P. 6. Screening and/or setbacks should be used to buffer adjoining properties from incompatible land uses.
- C13.P. 7. Establish standards for new development requiring vegetative buffers and landscaping along highway corridors.
- C13.P. 8. Encourage vegetative buffers and landscaping for existing development, where such planting can be accommodated.
- C13.P. 9. Commercial and industrial development or redevelopment within the County should be subject to general guidelines which would result in enhancing the appearance of the built environment in Talbot County. These development appearance guidelines for non-residential structures should recommend treatments for such factors as:
1. Relationship of proposed building to the site;
  2. Relationship of proposed buildings to adjoining buildings and sites;
  3. Site landscaping;
  4. Building design;
  5. Signs; and
  6. Maintenance

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C13.P. 10. New residential development and infill development should be designed to be compatible with and complement existing character and design reflected in the adjacent or surrounding community.

C13.P. 11. Encourage developers to solicit community input early in the development process.

### **Countywide Community Design Implementation Strategies**

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**Design Manual.** The County design manual prepared in 1991 identifies and illustrates design concepts and principles which achieve the images defined in this chapter of the Plan. The County should continue to utilize the manual to encourage desirable future development and to prescribe the design review process for future residential, commercial and industrial development and redevelopment. The design manual should be updated or replaced and should contain specific and enforceable design standards and should be based upon the general design guidelines outlined in this chapter. The manual should contain illustrations to help explain design guidelines. Measurable lighting standards should be developed as a component of the manual and should be established in appropriate ordinances.

**Site Plan Review.** Continue to require site plans for non-residential development to include building elevations, lighting, signage, parking area and landscaping details.

**Community Input.** Applicants for major subdivisions and commercial/industrial development are encouraged to actively seek community input in the planning and design process prior to submission of the development plan. Applicants may be required to advertise and conduct a community meeting within the vicinity of the proposed development site prior to submission of the final plan to the County Planning Office and Planning Commission.

**Design Review Committee.** The Planning Commission should consider having a Design Review Committee to assist in ensuring that new commercial and industrial development is in conformance with adopted design guidelines and zoning regulations. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) should consult a qualified design professional to advise on issues regarding building design or landscape design.

## **IV. Development Appearance Guidelines for Non-Residential Development**

The following general guidelines should be the basis for development of appearance standards for future development in the County and are intended to supplement specific regulations contained in the County Zoning Ordinance.

### **Relationship of Proposed Building to Site**

- The site should be planned to accomplish a desirable transition to the streetscape and to provide for adequate planting, safe pedestrian movement and screened parking.
- New buildings in village centers should be allowed to reduce front setbacks to enhance the traditional street/building relationships which exist with older adjacent structures.

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- Parking areas should be screened from public streets and paths.
  - The height and scale of each new building should be compatible with its site and existing adjacent buildings.
  - Utility and service connections should be placed underground wherever possible.

#### **Relationship of Proposed Buildings and Site to Adjoining Buildings and Sites**

- Adjacent buildings of different architectural styles should be made compatible by such means as screens, site breaks and materials.
- Attractive landscape transition to adjoining properties should be provided.
- Adjacent incompatible land uses should be screened from one another. The degree of screening should be directly related to the degree of incompatibility between the land uses.
- Required landscaping and/or screening should be located so that site lines are preserved for pedestrian and vehicular traffic, particularly when adjacent to points of ingress and egress.

#### **Landscape and Site Treatment**

- Where natural or existing topographic patterns contribute to the beauty and utility of a development site they should be preserved.
- Landscape treatment should be provided to enhance architectural features and site design.
- In locations where plants will be susceptible to injury by pedestrian or motor traffic, they should be protected by appropriate curbs, tree guards or other devices.
- Parking areas and traffic ways should be enhanced with landscaped spaces containing trees or tree groupings.
- Screening of service yards and other places that tend to be unsightly should be accomplished by use of walls, fencing and/or plantings. Screening should be effective in all seasons.
- In areas where general plantings will not prosper, other materials such as fences, walls, and pavings of wood, brick, stone, gravel and cobbles should be used. Carefully selected plants should be combined with such materials where possible.
- Exterior lighting should be of a design and size compatible with the building and adjacent areas. Lighting should be restrained in design and excessive brightness or glare avoided.
- Design of landscaping or buffers should reflect the use of native vegetation and plant materials over non-native vegetation.

#### **Building Design**

- Buildings should have good scale and be in harmonious conformance with neighboring development.
- Material should have good architectural character and should be selected for harmony of the building with adjoining buildings.
- Mechanical equipment or other utility hardware on roof, ground or buildings should be screened from public view with material harmonious with the building, or they should be located so as to not be visible from public ways.

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- Monotony of design in multiple building developments should be avoided. Variation of detail, form and siting should be used to provide visual interest.

### **Signs**

- Every sign should have good scale and proportion in its design and in its visual relationship to buildings and surroundings.
- Every sign should be designed as an integral architectural element of the building and site to which it principally relates.
- The number of graphic elements on a sign should be held to the minimum needed to convey the sign's message and should be composed in proportion to the area of the sign face.
- The color materials and lighting of every sign should be restrained and harmonious with the building and site to which it relates.
- The County should establish increased penalties and stricter enforcement measures regarding illegal signs.

### **Maintenance - Planning and Design Factors**

- Continued good appearance depends upon the extent and quality of maintenance. The choice of materials and their use, together with the types of finishes and other protective measures should be conducive to easy maintenance and upkeep.

## **V. Designated and Future Growth Areas**

The Designated and Future Growth Areas are those areas adjacent to the incorporated towns where future development will occur. The growth areas are bounded by the town boundaries and the County's growth boundary, or Countryside Preservation Area. Incremental development in the growth areas at the edges of the towns has gradually eroded the boundary between "countryside" and "settled town". Implementation of a Countryside Preservation Area as a growth boundary is intended to create the hard edge separation of the designated growth areas and rural areas.

Until such time as the growth area is annexed into the adjacent town, county development regulations and design guidelines recognize the unique character of these areas. As building trends indicate, the growth areas are under increasing development pressure because of the limited availability of large parcels of land for large scale residential and commercial development in many of the incorporated towns. The challenge for the County's comprehensive plan is to encourage appropriate development patterns that can be seamlessly incorporated into the town when annexed.

Traditional residential communities, with a mix of housing types and densities, neighborhood retail and commercial centers and appropriate civic and community facilities are the preferred development form in the growth areas. Streets should be interconnected and equipped with street trees and lighting and designed to be shared by pedestrians, bicyclists and automobiles. Plans for new residential neighborhoods should incorporate easements and rights-of-way that will be required when the neighborhood is annexed into the town.

Many of the County's existing commercial uses are located in the gateway entrances and scattered

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sites throughout the growth area. Commercial, retail and service uses should be limited to planned commercial and industrial parks, expansion of existing developments, or neighborhood centers proposed in conjunctions with a residential community.

The gateway entrances to the Towns signal the transition between the rural and urban areas. These areas are the introduction to what lies beyond. They create the first impression of the character of the community and should be attractive and well designed. Design guidelines for new commercial development in the gateways should be compatible with the town's long-range vision for the corridors. As existing commercial buildings or shopping centers are redeveloped, property owners should be encouraged to gradually transform them into inter-connected mixed-use centers compatible with the design guidelines for the corridor.

### **Designated Growth Areas Design Guideline Policies**

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C13.P. 12. Development within the designated growth areas should apply design concepts that complement and enhance the development patterns of the towns.

### **Designated Growth Areas Design Guidelines**

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Mixed use development is encouraged in and around existing towns to reinforce the traditional growth patterns, reduce auto trips, minimize additional road improvements and encourage walking to employment and shopping.

Residential developments should be planned as mixed-use communities with a range of housing types and densities, should include appropriately scaled retail and commercial centers serving the neighborhood.

Neighborhood streets should be interconnected throughout the community.

Commercial, retail and service uses should be limited to gateway corridors, expansion of existing developments, or neighborhood centers proposed in conjunction with a residential community.

Non-residential development located in the major and minor arterial corridors should be compatible with the scale and character of the adjoining town. "Chain" commercial and retail architectural styles are discouraged in the gateway corridors.

### **Designated Growth Area Design Guidelines Implementation Strategies**

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**Coordination with towns.** The County should coordinate with the towns in the review and approval of development projects adjacent to the towns and in matters of town annexations.

**Gateways and Entrance Corridors.** Adopt gateway and entrance corridor regulations including site design standards.

**Transportation Network.** Adopt a master thoroughfare plan that includes future connections to town road networks. Transportation facilities in the Growth Areas should include sidewalks and pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

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## VI. Villages

The Land Use Plan (Map3-1) identifies numerous Village Centers throughout the agricultural and rural areas of Talbot County. Villages are established residential and business communities which have traditionally served as focal points for the surrounding rural area. They play an important functional role in providing homes, neighborhood businesses and civic buildings such as post offices, firehouses, churches, etc. Many of the rural Villages throughout Talbot County contain historical and architecturally significant buildings and sites.

Villages range in size and character from small crossroad settlements and historic waterfront villages, to larger commercial and residential centers that have developed around major agribusinesses.

Many of the villages near the Bay and inlets reflect the charm of Talbot County's early history, with buildings from the 1800s and early 1900s. Several of these areas have been revitalized as tourism destinations with small B&B's and specialized retail.

The Village of Cordova is the largest village in the County. Cordova has grown over the years from a small rural settlement to a thriving village with a mix of residences, neighborhood serving commercial businesses and agri-businesses.

In general in the rural areas of the County, villages are the preferred location for single and multi-family residential development. Accessory apartments and small-multi family buildings provide opportunities for elderly and affordable housing accessible to community services and employment.

Villages should continue to be a mix of residential, small-scale commercial and public/semi-public uses. Infill development should be compatible with the existing building height, massing and front and side setbacks. Commercial and industrial development should be sensitive to community character and existing development patterns.

### **Village Design Guideline Policy**

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C13.P. 13. New development and redevelopment in village centers should be compatible with the existing character of the village in terms of land use, density, scale, setbacks, site layout and general design.

### **Village Non-Residential Use Design Guidelines.**

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*Design characteristics.* Village character can be described by types of uses, building heights, massing and setbacks, and community design characteristics such as landscaping and vegetation, signage, lighting, location of parking, and roadway character.

Recognizing the unique character of each of the County's villages, new development in the form of redevelopment of existing sites or infill should be compatible with the surrounding buildings. Where new construction is surrounded by existing historic buildings, building height and exterior materials should be harmonious with those of adjacent properties. Residential, small-scale

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commercial and public/semi-public uses should be permitted to coexist adjacent to one another.

***Building setbacks.*** New and infill buildings should be allowed to reduce front setbacks to enhance traditional street/ building relationships.

***Landscaping and vegetation.*** Mature trees, located along roadways or on undeveloped sites should be preserved. New and replacement roadway trees should be chosen to diversify the tree species and prevent loss due to disease. All new non-residential development should be required to have both roadway trees and street front landscaping consisting of a mix of trees and shrubs.

***Buffering and screening.*** Commercial and industrial uses adjacent to residential or lower intensity nonresidential uses should be buffered by landscaping or screening.

***Parking.*** In villages, where on-street parking is permitted, infill retail and commercial development should be encouraged to locate parking facilities to the rear of the building. Parking facilities on the side of buildings should be screened by a mix of trees and shrubs.

***Lighting.*** Lighting should be controlled in both height and intensity to maintain the rural character of the villages. Lighting should be shielded to prevent excessive lighting and glare beyond lot lines onto neighboring properties or public ways.

***Signage.*** Signage is one of the most readily apparent aspects of community character in Village Centers. Since signs are intended to be highly visible and attract attention, they often produce a lasting impression on locals and visitors. Signs in Village Centers should relate to pedestrians and people in slow moving vehicles. The size, materials, color, lettering, placement and illumination of signs in Village Centers should respect the unique character of existing buildings. Signs should be designed as an integral architectural element of the building and site.

***Outdoor storage.*** Open storage areas, exposed machinery and outdoor areas used for storage and collection of trash should be visually screened from roads and surrounding land uses.

***Public facilities and utilities.*** Roadways through and in the village should be of the appropriate width and function.

The County should facilitate the location of utility easements within public right-of-way, and the collocation of utilities within easements. Utility and service connections should be placed underground wherever possible.

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## Village Design Guideline Implementation Strategy

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**Small area plans.** Establish a process for undertaking a master planning process for each of the villages to establish guidelines for future infill and redevelopment.

## VII. Agricultural and Rural Areas

In the Agricultural and Rural Planning Areas the traditional development pattern can be described as single family residences set back from roadways, frequently buffered by trees, hedgerows and vegetation. Agricultural outbuildings, barns, silos and other structures are frequently located in the vicinity of the primary residence. Large fields are broken by lines of trees and hedgerows. Creeks, streams and wetlands are usually left in their natural vegetative state buffering these areas from impacts from agricultural activities.

The majority of the County's agricultural and rural lands are designated as Agriculture, Resource Conservation, Western Rural Conservation and Countryside Preservation areas in the Land Use Plan. Within these areas, agriculture is the preferred use, however, low density, single-family housing is also permitted. To preserve agricultural land and open space, when land will be subdivided for a residential neighborhood, a cluster development pattern is encouraged. Cluster development locates residences on smaller individual lots, surrounded by permanently conserved open space or agricultural land. To encourage the preservation of agricultural lands and the rural landscape, land use regulations and easement programs encourage conservation of farmlands, forestlands and environmentally sensitive lands.

### Agricultural and Rural Area Design Guideline Policies

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C13.P. 14. The County should preserve its unique rural landscape through conservation of farmland, forestlands, and environmentally sensitive lands by application of land use regulations and easement programs that conserve open space in rural areas.

### Design Guidelines for agricultural and rural areas

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#### *General guidelines.*

Building lots should be located to conserve open space and farmlands and minimize potential conflicts between residents and farm operations.

Buildings should be set back and/ or buffered from public roads to preserve scenic rural views. On wooded lots, buildings should be located within the wooded fringes to preserve the tree cover.

Environmentally sensitive areas of the site should be protected as open space. Lots should be located on areas of the site which have the fewest environmental constraints.

***Large lot residential development.*** When siting new buildings on large residential lots (20+ acres) efforts should be made to conserve natural features. When structures are sited along existing roadways, building setbacks should complement existing development patterns. New buildings are encouraged to emulate the character of the area in height, setbacks, and massing.

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***Moderate rural residential development.*** The moderate rural residential subdivisions are residential communities consisting of 2 to 10 acre lots. The greatest percentage of these communities are located in the County's Critical Areas. New buildings should be sited to protect the existing visual quality and natural resources values that make these areas distinctive. Development plans should recognize the importance of environmental features and the natural terrain. Buildings should be placed to minimize the need for excessive land disturbance.

***Cluster development.*** Cluster development is characterized as two or more small lots located in close vicinity to each other, so as to preserve agricultural lands and open space. Individual properties should be accessed from a shared access road that connects to the main road. Access roads should be developed to provide adequate access for public safety vehicles, while maintaining a low speed rural residential character defined by narrow travel lanes with unpaved shoulders and drainage swales.

Natural features such as creeks, streams, and wetlands should be protected from disturbance. Where feasible, new structures should be screened from public roads and buffered by trees and hedgerows.

***Lighting.*** In agricultural and rural areas lighting is traditionally low wattage residential and security lighting. Lighting fixtures should be directed downward. Wall packs and security lighting should be shielded to direct light downward.

***Nonresidential Uses:*** Nonresidential development in the agricultural and rural areas includes agri-businesses or maritime businesses that provide services to the nearby farms and marine uses.

Commercial and industrial development in agricultural and rural areas should be located on appropriately sized roads. Buildings should be sited close to the roadway, while providing appropriately sized entrances and parking for large commercial and farm vehicles. Consideration should be given to providing deceleration or turning lanes to reduce conflicts between turning vehicles and through traffic. To preserve the rural character of these areas, lighting should be shielded and directed downward. Consideration should be given to reducing lighting between 10:00 pm and 5:00 am to the minimum required for safety and security.

Residential neighborhoods should not be located near agri-businesses that may be considered to be a nuisance because they generate noise, dust or odors. The agricultural and rural areas are the preferred location for these businesses.

***Signage.*** The use of natural materials (wood, brick) for signs located in the agricultural and rural areas is encouraged.

## **VIII. Highway Corridor Development**

The large-scale and permanent loss of scenic views, characteristic rural landscapes and open space is perhaps the most devastating visual result of strip development. If allowed, strip development along rural highways and roads will eventually obscure the open fields and woodlands that are so much a part of the County's rural character. This form of development contributes greatly to the loss of

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Rural Character in the County. Strip development also requires numerous access points which contribute to a reduction in traffic safety and increased congestion on the roadway.

### **Highway Corridor Design Guideline Policies**

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C13.P. 15. Strip development along the County highways and roads is prohibited.

### **Highway Corridor Design Guidelines**

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A redesign program to gradually transform commercial strip development into mixed-use sub centers should achieve the following:

- Consolidate entrances along the road to a few main driveways with internal service streets based on a block system to connect businesses in between;
- A unified streetscape with continuous street trees, high quality landscaping, and where possible in light of agricultural traffic, planted medians to prevent unlimited left hand turns;
- Sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the area to create connections to shared parking, public transportation, walking between stores and nearby housing;
- Attractive architecture, wall signs and sidewalks featured along the frontage. Pole signs and signage for commercial centers should be minimized.
- Parking lots should be hidden and well landscaped,
- A mix of housing and other uses near the shopping that begins to build a walkable neighborhood rather than a strictly commercial driving district.

### **Highway Corridor Implementation Strategies**

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#### **Highway Corridor Plans.**

To begin to reclaim existing shopping strips outside of the town centers and village the County (and where appropriate the Towns) should prepare highway corridor plans that outline a cooperative long-term redesign program to gradually transform strips into mixed-use sub-centers.

#### **Highway Corridor Overlay Zone**

Adopt a highway corridor overlay zone with appropriate design standards and guidelines, working with the State Highway Administration on strategies to consolidate entrances, and initiating projects to retrofit service roads and other improvements that reduce access and traffic conflicts in existing strip locations.