
Chapter 5 Community Services and Facilities

I. Vision Statement

Sustaining and enhancing high quality community services and facilities strongly contributes to the overall quality of life in Talbot County. Land use decisions throughout the County are made based on the actual or planned location and availability of services and facilities including: drinking water; sewerage; waste management; emergency services; police protection; educational, healthcare and social services; roadways; libraries; and government services.

The County has programs in place that require adequate facilities and services are maintained and not jeopardized by development. To ensure the adequacy of the infrastructure prior to any development (an individual home, a residential development or a commercial property), the County employs methods that guarantee the cost of development is borne by the developer.

The need for community services and facilities is determined by the size, composition and geographic distribution of the County's population, recognizing that sizing of sewerage, potable water and roadways are based on peak rather than average load requirements. Sizing of the services in this manner accommodates swings in population between summer and winter months, weekends and weekdays. Talbot County provides services that effectively meet the County's changing needs and is consistent with planned and agreed land use patterns.

Goal

Provide an equitable system of public facilities and services that effectively meets community needs and is consistent with planned land use patterns.

II. Introduction

Community services and facilities are provided to Talbot County residents by local and state government, public/private ventures, and the private sector. The community services and facilities discussed in this Plan element include: public utilities, solid waste management, public safety, education, libraries, health care and government offices. Parks and Recreation facilities are discussed separately in Chapter Nine.

The availability, affordability and quality of community services are important indicators of the County's overall quality of life. If the demographics of the County's population continues to change, with increasing numbers of older, retired citizens settling in the County, especially in the peninsular and western areas, demand for services will change. The demand for schools and outdoor recreation would decrease, while the need for easily accessible services such as libraries, health care and emergency services would increase. At the same time, the Towns of Easton and Trappe propose to grow significantly over the next ten to fifteen years.

Planning for community facilities and services takes into account the current community needs, as well as projected changes in both the needs of the community and proposed growth. County owned facilities are funded through the Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Public schools are funded from local, state, federal and private revenue sources. In FY 02/03, more than 50% of County revenue was used to fund public education.

Talbot County's ability to raise revenue to meet the increasing demands for publicly funded services is hampered by a revenue cap that has been in place since the 1970s. Talbot County limits real property tax revenue growth to the lesser of 2% on growth for the preceding calendar year or the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers (CPI-U). While the recorded value of sales of existing homes has risen dramatically in the past five years, the County has not benefited from this upturn. Though the cap excludes new construction, as noted in Chapter Two, more than 50% of new homes are being constructed in the incorporated areas. The ability of the County to meet the rising demands for services will continue to be an issue if the current trend of an increasingly elderly population, aging in place, continues.

In response to projected trends, the County has explored a range of options to distribute costs associated with growth fairly among existing and future residents. The Comprehensive Plan provides policies for directing growth in the County so that public services can be maintained at an acceptable level. In 2003, the County engaged the services of Tischler & Associates to evaluate implementation of impact fees or an excise tax on new development to generate revenue for public facilities. Both options have the potential to generate new revenue. A final decision has not been reached on the costs vs. benefits of either option.

The County has also considered adoption of an adequate public facilities ordinance (APFO). An APFO establishes standards that allow the approval of new development only when there is adequate infrastructure capacity to serve it. The County should have in place a capital improvement plan for the maintenance and expansion of these services to meet the planned future growth. Developers wishing to proceed before the planned improvement or expansion may construct or pay for additional facilities needed beyond those which exist or scheduled as part of the CIP. As an example, in Talbot County, the provision of central water and sewage disposal is a primary factor which influences the location and intensity of future development. It is recommended that level of service standards be developed for County facilities.

Countywide Community Facilities and Services Policies

- C05.P.1. Public facilities and services, which are intended to meet countywide needs, should be centrally located. Likewise, those facilities and services intended to serve local community needs should be located within the community.

- C05.P.2. All planned major County public facilities shall be prioritized and scheduled as part of a Comprehensive Five Year Capital Improvements Program.

- C05.P.3. Public facilities and service improvements designed to correct existing system inadequacies should be completed prior to beginning County-funded improvements designed to accommodate new growth.

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- C05.P.4. Wherever possible, the existing public facilities and services of the County and its towns should be efficiently expanded rather than creating new services and facilities.
- C05.P.5. Public facility and service improvements should be efficiently coordinated with the County's land use plan, Comprehensive Water and Sewerage Plan, Master Plan for Education and other County plans related to capital improvements programming.
- C05.P.6. Public facilities and services should be scaled to the needs of the area they are designed to serve. Rural areas of the County should be provided facilities and services which match rural needs. Planned growth areas around towns should be provided a level of facilities and services matched to needs that are more intensive.
- C05.P.7. New development projects should not be approved or built in areas of the County where infrastructure and services such as roads, schools, sewer service, water supply, and fire and police protection are not adequate to accommodate the needs of the development. Exemptions to this policy might be considered provided the developer contributes the money needed to improve the facility.
- C05.P.8. The costs of new or expanded community facilities and services should be equitably and proportionally shared by all those who will benefit from the improvements.
- C05.P.9. The County should seek regional solutions to providing community services or facilities when demonstrated to be cost effective.
- C05.P.10. The County should seek State coordination to assist the County and towns to establish effective public facilities available for development.

III. Public Utilities

A. Water

The Talbot County Comprehensive Water and Sewerage Plan (CWSP) provides detailed information on County water supply sources, existing and proposed water facilities, and schedules for improvements. The County has adopted a Groundwater Protection Plan to protect and conserve groundwater resources. When updating the Groundwater Protection Plan, the County monitors changes in federal water quality standards.

Groundwater quality in the County is generally good with some localized problems of high nitrate levels, high sodium and chlorine levels and lowering groundwater levels. Since growth and development is ultimately constrained by groundwater quantity and quality, the County should continue to study groundwater resources and establish follow-up mechanisms to monitor changes that occur over time.

There are central water systems in Easton, Oxford, St. Michaels, and Trappe, and private community water systems in Claiborne, Martingham, and Hyde Park. The Talbot County Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan (CWSP) outlines planned improvements for each of these systems.

B. Sewer

Wastewater systems in Talbot County are quite varied, ranging from individual systems with sub-surface disposal (septic systems), to innovative community systems, to municipal systems utilizing mechanical equipment. Detailed information on sewage treatment and disposal can be found in the Talbot County Comprehensive Water and Sewerage Plan (CWSP).

The CWSP outlines the characteristics and capacities of the central and community wastewater treatment collection and disposal systems within the County. The CWSP also details plans for expansions and improvements at each of these existing facilities. County owned and operated facilities are located in Tilghman and St. Michaels, serving Tilghman Village, St. Michaels, Rio Vista-Bentley Hay, Newcomb, Royal Oak, Bellevue, Unionville, Tunis Mills, and Copperville. Municipal systems are located in Easton, Oxford and Trappe. Community systems are located at Hyde Park, MEBA Engineering School and Martingham. As these facilities are modified or upgraded over time, peak and seasonal loads should be considered in the design and operation of these facilities. Environmental impact statements should be prepared in the design phase and include stormwater and wastewater load calculations. Growth and related increased demand for sewer treatment should be limited to the capacity of the plant at peak periods at the new State standards. The St. Michaels treatment facilities are currently being upgraded to improve system treatment quality and capacity.

The County has adopted a Shared-Facilities Ordinance which allows for the expanded development of community-owned and operated wastewater disposal systems and the creation of new types of systems serving more than one household.

Soil and water table conditions generally determine the suitability of sub-surface disposal systems. The County Groundwater Protection Plan has designated soils in the area generally to the east of U.S. Route 50 as suitable for sub-surface discharge of wastewater, except in areas with a high water table. The Groundwater Protection Plan has designated areas generally to the west of U.S. Route 50 as susceptible to sub-surface system failures because of high water tables, low elevations, and silty or clay soils with low permeability.

The majority of residential properties in the County are served by individual septic systems. Permits for these systems are reviewed and approved by the County Health Department as an agent of the Maryland Department of Environment. Certain areas of the County have problems with failing septic systems, high groundwater tables or concentrations of small lots on poorly drained soils. These areas include: Wittman, Neavitt, Fairbanks, Queen Anne, and Claiborne. The Comprehensive Plan recommends that on-site septic systems should be inspected and monitored to insure they are functioning properly.

Public Utility Policies

C05.P.11. The County should insure that privately owned and operated water and sewer

facilities are adequately maintained by requiring comprehensive and legally binding maintenance agreements between system owners and users.

- C05.P.12. In Designated Growth Areas, new development may be required to install “dry” water and sewer lines so that a development can be connected to public water and sewer when services are available.
- C05.P.13. The County should coordinate the technical review of large-scale development projects with various County and/or town development review agencies and private utility companies in order to insure that utilities and easements are provided in a planned and efficient manner.

IV. Solid Waste Management

Talbot County, along with Caroline, Kent, and Queen Anne’s counties, currently utilizes a regional landfill adjacent to the existing Easton Wastewater Treatment Facility on Barkers Landing Road to meet disposal needs. The landfill is operated by the Maryland Environmental Service (MES), a non-profit, quasi-public agency of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources under the general direction of representatives of the four counties.

The Midshore Regional Landfill is an integrated solid waste management facility featuring brush and landscape mulching, sludge utilization, materials recycling, bald tire processing, waste oil and lubricants collection, refrigerant removal, and scrap metal and appliance recycling, in addition to providing solid waste disposal operations. The facility will be closed on December 31, 2010. The new landfill, Midshore II Regional Landfill will open on January 1, 2011 in Caroline County. The County is exploring options for the reuse of the current landfill as a transfer station and recycling center. As part of the waste transfer option, the County will explore maintaining the homeowner drop-off facility and establishing waste coupons for the disposal of trash at the transfer facility.

A Solid Waste Hauling Study prepared for Talbot County in the late 1980s concluded that house-to-house garbage pick-up and/or an expanded system of transfer stations would not be cost-effective since the existing landfill is centrally located within the County and features a residential drop-off facility. When the regional landfill is moved to Caroline County, it will become necessary for Talbot County to review additional solid waste handling requirements.

The Maryland Recycling Act of 1988 requires that each County recycle at least 15 percent of its solid waste. The Talbot County Recycling Plan, completed and implemented in 1990, has enabled the County to meet recycling targets.

Solid Waste Management Policy

- C05.P.14. The County should explore the feasibility of improving the existing solid waste collection system.
- C05.P.15. The County should continue to encourage and increase the ease of recycling of solid waste resources to prolong landfill life and conserve natural resources.

Solid Waste Management Implementation Strategy

Action: In anticipation of the re-location of the regional landfill, a plan should be established soon to identify and resolve future solid waste transfer, handling and disposal requirements.

V. Public Safety

A. Emergency Services

The Talbot County Emergency Management Agency (EMA) coordinates all local emergency services within the County through its 911 system. In recent years, the County has developed a comprehensive road naming and property numbering program to assist in implementing 911 services. The Emergency Management Agency is also responsible for development of the Talbot County Emergency Management Plan. This Plan delineates the roles and responsibilities of local government and private agencies for the response and recovery phases of emergency activities.

Fire, rescue, ambulance and emergency medical services are provided by the seven volunteer fire companies within the County. Volunteer fire companies are located in Queen Anne, Cordova, Easton, Oxford, Trappe, St. Michaels and Tilghman. The volunteer companies receive funding support from the State, County and towns. However, the majority of funds needed to provide services and to purchase and maintain equipment are derived through private donations and fund raising activities sponsored by the various volunteer companies.

Although the need for fire, rescue, ambulance and emergency medical services has been increasing in the County, many of the fire companies are having difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers. Being a fire company volunteer requires a large commitment of time for continuous training, responding to calls and assisting with fund raising activities. Many of the local volunteer companies are having difficulty raising funds to update and improve equipment which is needed to respond to an ever growing number of calls.

Advanced Life Support (ALS) services have recently been established in Talbot County. ALS provides 24 hour emergency response by trained paramedics and cardiac rescue technicians. ALS services are provided by volunteer and paid staff. Funding for ALS is derived from the County, fund raising activities and private donations. ALS service has also been experiencing difficulty in securing funds for equipment needs related to an increasing number of calls.

Responsibility for law enforcement in the County is shared by the Talbot County Sheriff's Department, Easton Police Department, St. Michaels Police Department, Oxford Police Department and the Maryland State Police.

Talbot County constructed a Detention Center in 1992 that permitted conversion of the former jail facility at the rear of the Courthouse to house government office uses. The maximum capacity of the Detention center is 132 inmates. The center was designed to meet the needs of the County through the year 2018, at which time expansion or an additional facility may be required.

Emergency Services Policies

C05.P.16. The County should provide effective and efficient emergency services through a unified emergency services system using national and state regulations, standards, and guidelines to evaluate system performance and make system improvements.

VI. Education

The Talbot County Public School System consists of five elementary schools, one middle school, one middle / high school and one high school. The schools are located in nine buildings, which include two buildings for the Easton Elementary School. The schools are operated by the Talbot County Board of Education.

Current population projections indicate a steady decline in the school population. In 2003, there were 4,310 school age children in Talbot County. By 2010, that number is projected to decrease to 3,810. The Talbot County public school system has adequate existing capacity on a County-wide basis to accommodate projected enrollment for the next ten years. However, there will be capacity problems at Chapel Elementary, White Marsh Elementary, Easton Middle, and Easton High. Other schools, including Tilghman Elementary, St. Michaels Elementary, St. Michaels Middle/High School and Easton Elementary at Dobson and Moton Buildings currently have excess capacity.

In addition to the public school system there are three private schools located in Easton. The Country School accommodates grades kindergarten through eight. St. Peter and Paul's School facilities accommodate grades kindergarten through twelve. The Chesapeake Christian School accommodates grades kindergarten through twelve.

Chesapeake College is a two year community college offering a two-year program of study in liberal arts and sciences and career programs. Salisbury University and Washington College are each located within an hour of the County and offers undergraduate and graduate degrees.

VII. Health Care

Memorial Hospital at Easton is the primary provider of medical and health care in Talbot County and the surrounding Mid-Shore region. The Memorial Hospital at Easton offers a full range of inpatient and outpatient care. The 137 bed acute facility, plus its 33 bed Skilled Nursing Unit, provides general hospital, emergency, and specialized services. Its convenient outpatient centers for primary care, diagnostics, treatment, education, and rehabilitation are located throughout the Mid-Shore. There are approximately 150 physicians practicing within the Hospital's service area.

The Talbot County Health Department offers all County residents services related to communicable disease control, environmental health and family health. Communicable disease control services

include offering immunizations, monitoring the spread of diseases, and testing and treatment for tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. The Environmental Health section services include: sampling and inspecting well water, tidal waters, swimming pools and well sites; inspection of septic systems and soil evaluations; monitoring of sludge applications; inspection of restaurants, seafood operations and other food processing facilities; and inspection of housing conditions in trailer parks, foster homes, labor camps and day care facilities.

The Talbot County Health Department also provides a wide array of family health programs. The County should encourage the State, as well as private, non-profit corporations and for-profit companies to expand mental health care services and facilities within the County commensurate with the needs of County residents.

VIII. Social Services

The Talbot County Department of Social Services provides a wide variety of assistance to residents of the County. These services include financial and emergency assistance, child support enforcement services, adoption, adult protective services, child day care, child protective services, family planning services, foster care for children, in-home aid services and legal services.

IX. Library Services

The Talbot County Free Library provides comprehensive library services to anyone who lives, works, goes to school or owns property in Maryland.

The main library is located in Easton and there are plans to build a new library in Easton, replacing this existing facility with a larger facility at a new location. The St. Michaels branch library has recently been updated as a full service facility. An additional branch at Tilghman Elementary School opened in the fall of 2003 to serve the Bay Hundred community. Currently about 25,901 Talbot County residents have library cards. Approximately 197,000 items are borrowed from the library each year. 21,194 residents participated in library sponsored programs during 2002.

X. Government Facilities and Offices

The Town of Easton is the County seat for Talbot County. Most County offices and State agency offices which serve Talbot County are located in Easton. As the needs of County and State government have grown over the years, offices and facilities have become spread out within the Town. The result is that residents who have business to conduct with the County or State government must go to several locations to get things done. The fact that various government offices are separated from one another also hinders coordination between agencies and departments. The South Wing of County Courthouse, which housed many of the County offices, is currently undergoing renovation. During the renovation, the County has moved offices to temporary space.

Government Facilities Policies

C05.P.17. The County should provide adequate space for various County offices and facilities.