
Chapter 10 Housing

I. Vision

The County, in cooperation with our incorporated towns and villages, provides a suitable inventory of affordable housing to either rent or buy. The housing mix is designed to satisfy the needs of all our people regardless of age or income level. Higher density development within our incorporated towns and an effective infrastructure growth plan contribute to keeping both initial and ongoing housing costs at the desired levels. Achieving the necessary number of units requires difficult planning decisions and the integration of related programs to reach the objectives.

Redevelopment of older neighborhoods within our incorporated towns and villages emphasizes restoration of historic houses. Infill construction of mixed residential types is encouraged. New housing development is directed toward designated growth centers.

Goal

Develop policies, initiate programs and acquire funding to help alleviate substandard housing conditions and provide, in appropriate locations, residential areas which can accommodate a variety of housing densities, types, sizes and costs to meet existing and future needs.

II. Introduction

Historically, the County has provided single-family housing at a lower cost compared to the larger metropolitan areas. Other housing types, such as apartments, townhouses and condominiums have traditionally been built either within or adjacent to the incorporated areas where public utilities are available. Between 1989 and 1992, the County, in response to State Critical Areas requirements and in an effort to conserve working farmland and open space, effectively down zoned over 87% of the County from what had been 1 house per 2 acres to on average 1 house per 20 acres. The intent of the down zoning was to permit less growth in the rural areas and concentrate growth in the incorporated towns and villages.

The effects of the down-zoning were not immediately apparent, as development continued to occur on already subdivided lots. Between 1997 and 2001, there has been an average of 47 lots per year receiving final subdivision approval. In 2001, more residential building permits were issued in the incorporated areas than in the County. This trend is expected to continue into the future as both the Town of Easton and the Town of Trappe develop.

In the County the primary form of housing is single-family homes on lot sizes of 2 acres or greater. There are some multi-family developments within the incorporated towns. In both the County and Towns, one issue that has been identified by the local building community is the lack of availability of single family lots for middle price range custom homes. The preponderance of development has been single developer subdivisions. This development pattern if it continues will have an impact on the architectural character of the County.

III. Housing Conditions

In 1987 and 2002 the County initiated studies of substandard housing. The 1987 study¹ included housing problems of the elderly and handicapped. The 2002 housing study found that between 1987 and 2002 Talbot County had significantly reduced its stock of substandard housing in the unincorporated areas of the County. The 2002 study² reported that only 148 housing units were substandard, of these only twenty four were occupied. Three factors were credited with reducing the number of substandard units by 50% between 1987 and 2002. First, a significant number of the substandard housing units had been abandoned. Secondly, in 1989 the County adopted a Minimum Livability Code to enhance enforcement of housing code violations. Third, volunteer and citizen groups had made many needed repairs to homes of the elderly and handicapped. Another factor in reducing the number of substandard units was a strong economy in the 1990s which provided the impetus for improvements to both tenant and owner occupied housing.

A. Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

One of the issues directly related to housing condition is access to public sewer and water. The County received Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) between 1999 and 2000 for approximately \$220,000 to fund utility extension and rehabilitation work for low to moderate income households in the unincorporated community of Chester Park contiguous to the Town of St. Michaels. The Chester Park project was further supported by a federal grant from the USDA Office of Rural Development for approximately \$250,000 to extend sewer to the community. In addition, \$180,000 was awarded to the County in 2002 for the upgrade of public facilities for the West Kennedy neighborhood prior to their annexation into the Town of Easton. In 2003, the County received a CDBG grant in the amount of \$450,000 for extension of the Town of Easton's sewer and water and annexation into the Town, for the unincorporated community of W. Glenwood Avenue, which borders the Town of Easton.

B. Special Loan Programs

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Special Loan Program provides low or no interest loans to moderate and low income landowners and landlords for home rehabilitation and lead paint risk reduction activity. As of 2003, Talbot County has received approximately \$750,000 in Special Loans.

C. Building Code and Livability Code

Talbot County adopted the International Residential Code (IRC) and the International Building Code (IBC) in January 2002. The codes apply to all new residential, commercial and industrial construction in the unincorporated areas of the County. Enforcement of the codes insures that all new construction meets minimum standards for safety and occupancy.

1 Morton Hoffman and Company, Inc. 1987.

2 Marvin G. Tossey, Ph.D., 2002

In 1989, the Talbot County Minimum Livability Code was adopted by the County Council and rewritten in 1999 to enhance enforcement and to establish a due process for violations. The Talbot County Minimum Livability Code applies to all rental housing units in the unincorporated areas of the County. The Code is enforced by the County on a complaint only basis. Each of the incorporated towns in the County has also adopted similar minimum livability codes as required by State law.

This County Minimum Livability Code protects the public health, safety and welfare in residential structures and premises by establishing property maintenance standards for basic equipment and facilities, maintenance standards for residential structures and premises,

- Establishing minimum property maintenance standards for basic equipment and facilities used for light, ventilation, heating and sanitation for residential structures and premises, and for safe and sanitary maintenance of residential structures and premises;
- Establishing minimum requirements for residential structures and premises for means of egress, fire protection systems, and other equipment necessary for safety from fire;
- Fixing the responsibilities of property owners, operators and tenants of residential structures and premises; and
- Providing for administration, enforcement and penalties.

IV. Assisted Housing for Special Needs Populations

Special populations include low income residents, the elderly, disabled residents and the homeless. The provision of housing for these populations often requires heavy subsidies, which have historically been provided by the federal and state governments. In recent years, federally assisted housing programs have been curtailed or eliminated placing a greater burden on the states and local jurisdictions.

The Community Development Administration (CDA), created in 1970, is a division of the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development and serves the housing needs for people with limited incomes, the elderly and the handicapped. As the State's housing finance agency, CDA provides mortgage financing for single and multi-family housing, finances home and energy conservation improvements in existing housing and administers Federal rent subsidies. Since 1974, the State CDA has provided over \$16,000,000 in financing in Talbot County through its programs for home-ownership, rental housing, special loans and housing subsidies.

The USDA Office of Rural Development is a Federal agency that provides funding for housing for low and moderate-income families and the elderly under its Section 515 program, and loans and/or grants for repairs under Section 504 for the elderly. USDA Office of Rural Development operates only in rural areas or towns with less than 10,000 persons outside of Metropolitan Statistical Areas. This would cover all of Talbot County, excluding the Town of Easton. There are currently three FmHA housing developments in Talbot County — Mulberry Hill Apartments in Easton contains 112 units, while Parkway Apartments and St. Michaels Cottages are both located in St. Michaels and contain 40 and 30 units respectively.

At present there are 140 public housing units in Talbot County – 65 are in the Town of Easton and 75 in the Town of St. Michaels. These units are operated by a Housing Authority in each town. Although these units are available to households throughout the County, priority is given to town residents. There is an extensive waiting list for low-income families wishing to move into these units.

Hamilton Village in St. Michaels is a twenty-four (24) unit HUD Section 202 development owned and operated by the Upper Shore Aging Housing Corporation. Hamilton Village serves low-income elderly residents and currently has an eighteen month to two year waiting list. Asbury Place in Easton is a twenty six unit development owned by the Town of Easton. These units were constructed as part of the Maryland Partnership Housing Program and represent the first phase of development providing low-income housing for the elderly.

V. Affordable Housing

While the number of dwelling units in Talbot County continues to increase, many County residents still find it difficult or impossible to obtain housing to meet their needs. Causing the problem are two major shortages — a lack of variety of housing types and a lack of suitable housing for low and moderate income families. Practically all the housing units in Talbot County, excepting some multi-family developments within the incorporated towns, are single-family detached homes. Within unincorporated areas of the County, these single-family homes are predominantly located on lot sizes two acres or greater in size.

Providing affordable housing options for middle- and low-income families is important to the long term economic and social vitality of the County. The location of housing – its proximity to jobs, childcare, stores and services and whether or not these are accessible by car, transit, or walking – also have a significant impact on the cost of living and therefore affordability.

In Talbot County, the problem is further compounded by lack of availability of affordably priced rental or for-purchase housing. The demand for housing generated by families moving in from other areas has escalated the price of land and housing. Many of the families moving into the County are second or third time homeowners and are able to finance expensive homes. Low and moderate income families are being priced out of the market in many areas of the County.

The County cannot control the housing market but can develop tools and methods to encourage the development of affordable and special needs housing. The Comprehensive Plan policies direct new development to the areas within the incorporated town boundaries, where the availability of public services permits greater residential densities. The Town of Easton and Trappe have both adopted policies that will permit a mix of housing types and price ranges that will meet the needs of many of the families with incomes below the median income.

The County established a County-wide Housing Advisory Board to pay attention to housing problems throughout the unincorporated and incorporated areas of the County. The Board includes County elected officials, civic leaders, realtors, developers, bankers, business leaders, community representatives, and social service representatives. The Housing Advisory Boards assists in public

education and awareness of housing problems, and facilitate taking advantage of available State and Federal housing programs. The Housing Coordinator serves as staff to this Advisory Board.

Housing Policies

C10.P. 1. The County encourages the development of a variety of housing types, styles and designs.

Housing Condition

C10.P. 2. Existing housing stock should be maintained, conserved and improved to support social and economic diversity within the community.

C10.P. 3. The County should provide assistance through available State and Federal programs for rehabilitation or, in some cases where no other alternative exists, for removal and replacement of existing substandard rental and owner-occupied housing units in the unincorporated areas of the County.

Special Needs Housing

C10.P. 4. The County should examine needs for development of an emergency shelter for the homeless.

Affordable Housing

C10.P. 5. The County should seek means of providing affordable housing for low and middle income families including the potential establishment of a County Housing Authority for the purpose of increasing access to state and federal funding programs.

C10.P. 6. Incentives should be provided to encourage the development of new affordable housing as well as to encourage restoration and rehabilitation of existing housing in the County's towns and village centers.

C10.P. 7. The County should develop a wide range of tools and methods to insure an adequate supply of affordable housing in new developments.

C10.P. 8. The County should encourage the incorporated Towns to require construction of a minimum percentage of moderately priced housing units in larger developments, rehabilitate existing affordable housing, or investigate other alternative methods for achieving and protecting affordable housing.

Manufactured Housing

C10.P. 9. Manufactured housing parks and subdivisions should continue to be allowed as a solution to providing affordable housing, provided they are developed in accordance with strict regulations regarding minimum and maximum size, location, compatibility with surrounding land uses, density and development standards.

C10.P. 10. Individual manufactured housing is permitted as single family dwellings by the specific criteria outlined in the Talbot County Zoning Ordinance.

C10.P. 11. Manufactured homes should be permitted as an accessory use to agricultural operations.

Accessory Units

C10.P. 12. Single accessory apartments or cottages should be permitted in agricultural and rural residential districts in the County.

Housing Implementation Strategies

Housing Condition

Action: Based on the 2002 Housing Study, prepare an action plan to eliminate substandard housing by 2010.

Action: Increase enforcement of the Hazardous Structures Ordinance to insure reduction in the number of unsafe structures.

Action: Continue enforcement of the Minimum Livability Code. Consider developing a program for regularly scheduled inspections to insure that all rental housing in the County is adequately maintained and that existing substandard rental housing is rehabilitated.

Action: Apply for Community Development Block Grants to rehabilitate substandard housing conditions in targeted areas.

Action: Provide assistance through available State and Federal programs for rehabilitation or removal and replacement of existing substandard rental and owner-occupied housing units in the unincorporated areas of the County.

Special Needs Housing

Action: Continue to support grant applications by the Towns for State and Federal Housing Subsidies.

Affordable Housing

Definition: The generally accepted definition of affordability is for a household to pay no more than 30 percent of its annual income on housing. Families who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care. Reference: U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Action: Research methods of requiring or encouraging affordable housing that best meets the needs of Talbot County citizens.

Action: Coordinate with the towns, local business and civic groups, the local financial and banking community, non-profit housing organizations, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development and the USDA Office of Rural Development to promote the development of affordable housing in Talbot County.

Action: Encourage the establishment of a joint commission of Talbot County, Talbot's towns and unincorporated Villages to initiate and implement a coordinated affordable housing program throughout the County, its towns, and its unincorporated villages.

Action: Initiate a study of the feasibility of establishing a "Housing Trust Fund".

Housing Coordinator

Action: The County should continue to support the Housing Office and the Housing Coordinator to oversee housing and community development programs, to focus on obtaining Federal and State financing and to give attention to the housing problems in the unincorporated areas of the County.