

## Royal Oak

### Introduction and Purpose

This document is intended to describe the evolution of the Royal Oak village and lay out a vision of its future, as part of the 2013 revision of the Talbot County Comprehensive Plan.

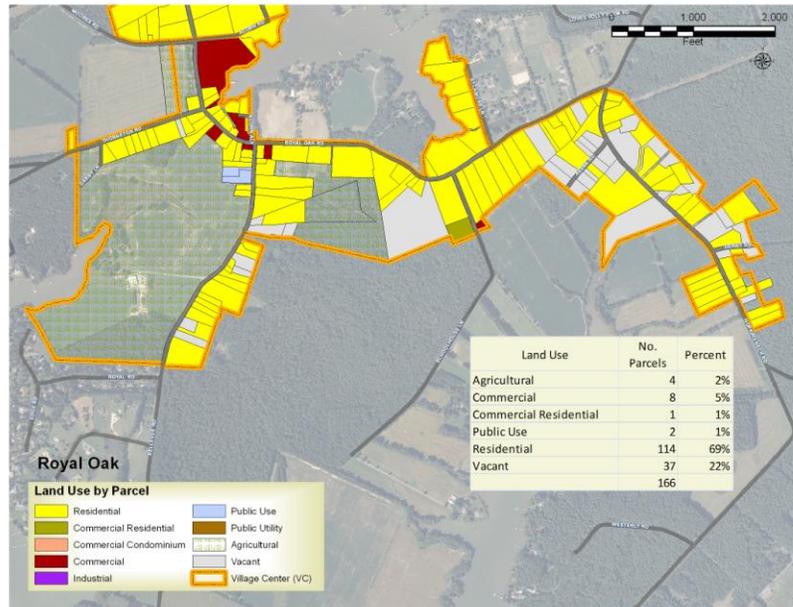
### History

Settlement in the area that is now Royal Oak dates back to land grants made in 1659. The village existed prior to the creation of both Easton and St. Michaels. Settlement in Royal Oak occurred because of its proximity to Oxford, a major shipping port. Royal Oak was recognized by the US government in 1837 as a town.

Since its inception, the village has been the home to various tradespersons and businesses. The following is a list extracted from *Twig and Turf III – The Royal Oak*, by R. Bernice Leonard, 1985:

*Blacksmiths, bricklayers, farriers, wheelwrights, fortuneteller, horse trainer, shoemakers, bricklayers, apothecary, grocers, butcher, department-store (compared to a Wanamaker's in the Easton newspaper), oyster market, gas station, 10 resort inns and boarding houses, antique shops, flute maker, decorative artist studio, auto repair, farmers, and waterman. There were six known schools and four different churches.*

One cannot comment on the history of Royal Oak without mentioning “the tree.” It is believed that the tree to which Royal Oak is named after was most likely a white oak. It was huge and ancient even during the time of the revolutionary war. It was originally called Bartlett's Oak as it stood on John Bartlett's land, most likely somewhere close to the Bellevue ferry road on the west side. Houses now stand there.



A military company called the Hearts of Oak gathered beneath the tree for roll call during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Someone hung cannon ball souvenirs in the tree after the engagements. When the tree was cut down in 1867 a post was set in place and the cannon balls were hung from it. Now they hang in the Royal Oak post office.

### People and Demographics

The following data was gathered from village residents' personal observations and counts. The population of Royal Oak is approximately 220 adults and 30 children, in 114 households. The majority of the children attend the St. Michaels' public schools. The majority of homes are filled with full time residents and of those most are second or third generation residents. There are a few homes that are occupied by part-time or weekend occupants.

Royal Oak is a stable community. Within the past 15 years, 29 new homes have been built. Several decrepit homes have been demolished and replaced with new homes. Currently there are 25 vacant lots, two-thirds of which may be available for sale. There has been a decline in homes with children, perhaps due to low village

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turnover, an aging population and limited availability of affordable homes/lots.

Most folks living in the village work service jobs in the county. Some work entirely in the village. Twenty-six homes have a commercial component, 3 landscaping contractors, 2 antique shops, 4 home offices, 3 studios, 9 carpenter workshops, 2 auto repair, 2 storage and 1 upholstery business.

Royal Oak is unusual for Talbot County, in that there has been little change in households over the years, owing in part to the opportunities afforded within Royal Oak and the surrounding area.

### Current Composition

Royal Oak is comprised of a mixture of lot sizes, home styles, agricultural uses, various commercial enterprises, and public facilities. The village has a public sewer system available to all properties within its boundaries as well as some peripheral areas outside the village zoning.

*East Royal Oak -Hopkins Neck/Royal Oak Road/Sycamore Lane/Schoolhouse Lane*

This area is primarily composed of modestly sized residential homes with 1 to 2+ acre lots. Houses are a mix of older homes, some dating back to the mid 19th century, others back to the 1950's, as well as many



newer houses built in the past 30 years.

Residents are business owners, builders, mechanics, equipment operators, real estate agents, landscapers, excavation engineers, musicians, entrepreneurs, architects, hospital staff etc.

You will also find in this area the old schoolhouse, converted to a residence,

Royal Oak Repair-an automobile repair shop, a refurbished church and a couple of old cemeteries.

### *Downtown*

As you approach downtown from

Easton on Royal Oak Road, the area is characterized by small lot (i.e., .10 to .25 acre) single family homes, some rentals and commercial enterprises. Antique stores, The General Store (also once a fine dining establishment), landscape operation, Post Office, Top of the Bay chimney sweep and several cottage industries run out of residents' homes and/or out buildings. Many lots and homes date back to 1800's.

Exiting Royal Oak, heading towards St. Michaels, there are the Royal Oak House Bed & Breakfast and The Oaks Inn &

Conference Center which hosts a number of events from fundraisers to weddings. Both of these are tourist and leisure destinations.

Turning to the South on Bellevue Road, downtown continues past Royal Oak Community

United Methodist Church, followed by a landscaping business and nursery and an automobile repair shop. Village Center zoning ends at the intersection of Bellevue Road and Royal Road, entrance to Royal Acres, a residential community.

Lastly Thorneton Road, just past the Post Office, is populated with a number of modestly sized homes. The village boundary stops just ¼ mile down Thorneton Road; however, the road continues for about a mile ending in a small waterfront community. Although the sewer was recently extended to this area, there is no plan to extend the village boundaries further.

**Public Facilities**

Royal Oak has two community facilities: the U.S. Post Office and the Royal Oak Community United Methodist Church. The church is the main community center. Along with holding weekly religious services, it hosts numerous



community events and allows use of its facility for exercise classes, a quilting club, Girl Scouts, small meetings, the elections and even provides free lemonade/water for bikers/hikers in the summer months. The post office doubles as an informal gathering meeting spot for villagers and outlying residents. Both the church and post office serve a key role in keeping people connected.

**Vision Statement**

This plan envisions Royal Oak as a continuing viable small business community that is a reflection of the past as

well as a growing dynamic mixture of artisans, creative entrepreneurs and businesses that serve and support residents as well as those visiting from afar.

**Actions Necessary to Achieve Vision**

In order to achieve this vision, the current village center (VC) zoning, affording various business opportunities, needs to be preserved for all properties within the current zoning district. In addition, we recommend that the density provisions that have been in place for many decades and are still in place (absent the Bill 1214 subdivision moratorium expiring April 2014) should continue, to ensure some managed growth within those boundaries. Finally, many village residents indicated that they felt the following were important

to Royal Oak’s future:

- Increased cooperation between the county government, especially regarding support of small, independent-owned businesses,
- An improved permitting process that is not cumbersome and overwhelming, and
- Easy affordable access to existing public utilities (e.g., sewer, cable, telephone).

**Sense of Community**

Our sense of community will be strengthened through the retention of service related activities. Everyone has a need for services; everyone has interactions with their neighbors. We have a local support system. We work with and depend on each other.

Royal Oak residents wish to reflect our diverse character by featuring the various business trades. Businesses should not

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have to be visually obstructed. We are not inclined to conceal our businesses or how we live and work. We want no further restrictions than what are currently in existence in the 2013 Talbot County zoning ordinance. Because we are a village of tradesmen, we feel that nuisances such as noise and debris created as part of that business are acceptable.

### **Service Amenities**

Residents feel that Royal Oak has adequate infrastructure. However, the village could benefit from a mosquito control program, as the area can be swarmed by mosquitoes during the warm wet weather months.

### **Safety**

Our one and only improvement we recommend for the benefit of our residents, our bicyclists, customers, visitors, pets, etc. would be adherence and forced compliance with our current speed limits.

In summary, we ask for support of Small Town America by continuing the tradition of generations of Royal Oak villagers to have viable opportunities to make a living while residing here. In addition, we desire to maintain our village boundaries and VC zoning that has been place for decades as

well as density provisions that have allowed moderate, managed growth.

### **Resident Support for Village Plan**

This plan was compiled by a voluntary group of village residents, business owners and property owners, based upon feedback and input over a course of several months.

An informal meeting was held at the Royal Oak Community United Methodist Church in late August 2013 whereby we discussed the proposed zoning changes. From those attendees, email addresses and phone numbers were gathered to ensure on-going communication.

On several occasions a few of the committee members writing this plan, walked door to door communicating the proposed zoning changes and inquired as to their opinion on any desired changes to the village. In addition, several villagers who had not attended any prior meetings were personally contacted.

Based upon the attendance and feedback from these meetings, personal calls, emails, visits, and review by numerous individuals, we feel that the enclosed plan accurately reflects the opinions of the majority of Royal Oak property owners, residents, and business owners.

