

Chapter 9 Community Design and Appearance

Vision

Through application of its design standards, Talbot County continues to project the image of a rural but sophisticated region; proud of its legacy and determined to protect its future with sound and decisive action. Land use policies that focus growth within town boundaries and design standards appropriate to the region significantly contribute to the objectives of sustainability and open space preservation.

Standards that guide community appearance and building design are in place and protecting the integrity of our rural landscape, our population and our infrastructure. Higher density residential development, out of scale with the small-town and rural surroundings, is directed toward designated growth areas. Development building patterns, more suitable in already built-up areas, are not located outside of our towns and villages.

Some past development has been mitigated through buffering and landscaping. Utility lines have been buried to avert service disruptions and enhance the views along highways and byways. Signage standards emphasize proper scale and appearance that is harmonious with the overall character of the area.

Goal

Ensure that development preserves and enhances the appearance and rural character of Talbot County through the application of design and subdivision standards.

I. Introduction

Managing the design of new development to enhance community appearance is an important goal of this Plan. Design standards significantly enhance real estate values, community pride, a sense of obligation to property, personal enjoyment and satisfaction, an ability to withstand natural disasters, and the overall investment and development climate in the County.

Chapter 2 (Land Use Plan) describes the present and future land uses for each planning area. This chapter presents the policies, guidelines and general standards for the physical development in each planning area.

This chapter begins with general guidance, followed by more specific comments for various types of development. The final section concerns design and appearance in the County's rural villages.

Within the guidance, the specific policies and implementation strategies are included to encourage innovative building design and site planning, while ensuring that principles of good community design are reinforced. Some of the implementation strategies recommend changes to existing site development ordinances and standards, while other strategies suggest ways to preserve the rural character of the County by controlling the form and pattern of future development.

Countywide Design Policies

9.1 The County seeks to preserve its irreplaceable unique rural landscape through land use regulations and easement programs that conserve open space in rural areas.

9.2 The County encourages site designs that complement the scale and character of existing and planned development. The *Talbot County Design Manual* should be updated or replaced, and should contain specific and enforceable design standards based upon the design guidelines outlined in this chapter. The manual should contain illustrations to help explain the guidelines. Lighting standards should be developed as a component of the manual and established in appropriate ordinances.

9.3 The County will encourage developers to solicit community input early in the development process.

9.4 Screening and/or setbacks shall be used to buffer adjoining properties from incompatible land uses.

9.5 The County should encourage vegetative buffers and landscaping for new and existing development, where such planting can be accommodated.

II. Design and Appearance

Talbot County's development pattern reflects the traditional mix of farms interspersed with small settlements, villages and towns, and water-oriented residential enclaves. Maintaining this traditional pattern is important to protecting land for agricultural use, open space, and the conservation of fragile environmental resources.

This section addresses design guidance for growth areas, highway corridors and rural areas as well as non-residential development.

The *Talbot County Design Manual* (1991) identifies and illustrates site design concepts and principles. Until updated, the County should continue to use the manual to illustrate desired architectural and site development precepts.

Applicants for major subdivisions and commercial or industrial development are encouraged to actively seek community input in the planning and design process, prior to a formal submission of a development plan. Applicants may be required to advertise and conduct a community meeting in the vicinity of the proposed development site, prior to submission of the final plan to the Planning Department and Planning Commission.

A. Designated Growth Areas and Future Growth Areas

The County's Designated Growth and Future Growth areas are adjacent to the incorporated towns, and most are zoned **Town Conservation (TC)**. This zoning is intended to support development at a scale and density appropriate to land planned for eventual annexation. Until such time as a growth area is annexed into the adjacent town, County development regulations and design guidelines seek to maintain the rural character of these areas (see Chapter 2).

Traditional residential development patterns -- with a mix of housing types and densities, neighborhood businesses, civic and community facilities -- are the preferred development form for growth areas. The annexing municipality should plan for streets that are interconnected and equipped with street trees, sidewalks 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 public utilities are extended by the town.

Growth Areas envision a range of housing types and densities upon annexation. Accessory apartments and small multi-family buildings should provide opportunities for the elderly and small families to secure affordable housing that is accessible to community services and employment.

B. Rural Residential Development

Most of the County's agricultural and rural lands are designated in the zoning ordinance as **Agricultural Conservation (AC), Rural Conservation (RC), Western Rural Conservation (WRC) and Countryside Preservation (CP)**. Base zoning densities are generally limited to 1 unit per 20 acres, with an original parcel having 3 additional lots in some zones. Additional restrictions on subdivisions in rural areas are covered by the Tier IV designation as outlined in Chapter 2.

Agriculture is the preferred use within these areas, though low density, single-family housing is also permitted. The traditional residential development pattern in these areas can be described as single family residences, frequently buffered by trees, hedgerows and vegetation. Agricultural outbuildings, barns, silos and other structures are frequently located in the vicinity of the primary residence. Creeks, streams and wetlands are usually buffered and protected to the greatest degree possible.

Land use regulations and easement programs are used to encourage the preservation of the rural landscape and encourage conservation of farmland, forests and environmentally sensitive areas (see Chapter 5).

1. Large Lot Residential Development

When subdividing large agricultural and rural parcels for residential development, every effort should be made to conserve natural features and prime agricultural soils. 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.

To preserve the integrity of agricultural lands and open space, new lots should be clustered when land is subdivided for residential development. Multi-lot subdivisions should be accessed from a shared road. New residential lots shall be drawn to respect existing vegetation, hedgerows, and farm fields to the greatest extent possible. To avoid fragmentation of agricultural lands and environmentally-sensitive features, new residential building lots should be less than 5 acres in size. Building lots should be situated to conserve open space, farmlands, and the commercial viability of agriculture. New development shall be screened wherever possible to minimize potential conflicts between residential and existing agricultural uses.

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 and habitat.

Environmentally sensitive areas of development sites should be protected as open space. Lots should be located on portions of the site that have the fewest environmental constraints. Natural features such as creeks, streams, and wetlands should be protected from disturbance.

2. Rural Villages

Talbot County has 22 unincorporated villages (see maps at the end of this chapter). Villages have their own zoning designation and are considered to be unique areas in terms of development. Most villages are a mix of residential, small-scale commercial and other uses, primarily serving local communities. Infill is the preferred development type, and where permitted, non-residential uses and development should be sensitive to existing development patterns.

Villages are discussed more extensively in Section III of this chapter, with recommendations for modifications to some village zoning districts, as illustrated in Appendix A.

3. Mid-sized Rural Residential Development

Lands currently zoned **Rural Residential (RR)** represent mid-sized rural subdivisions on lots generally of 2 to 10 acres in size. Most frequently found along waterfront areas, these subdivisions were generally platted and built-out prior to the adoption of the County's Critical Area Ordinance in 1989. More stringent subdivision requirements have followed since.

New in-fill buildings on vacant lots should be sited to protect the existing natural resources and attributes that make these areas distinctive. Development plans should recognize the importance of environmental features and the natural terrain. Buildings should be placed in such a way to minimize the need for excessive land disturbance. The County encourages the renovation or rebuilding of existing residential structures to comply with current Floodplain requirements.

Future Residential Growth Policies

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

9.7 The County and Towns should co-adopt a master thoroughfare plan that includes future connections to town road networks.

9.8 Design of new development within designated growth areas should complement and enhance the development patterns of the neighboring town.

9.9 Developers are encouraged to provide recreational space in residential development projects. Standards for provision of open space should be evaluated and updated as needed. Such standards shall not permit land area utilized for golf course facilities to satisfy recreational space requirements.

C. Rural Non-Residential Development

Non-residential development permitted in the agricultural and rural areas includes agribusinesses or maritime businesses including, but not limited to, grain storage facilities, aquaculture, seafood processing, farm markets, farm equipment dealers, and on-farm processing that provide services to the nearby farms and marine uses.

Agricultural and rural areas are the preferred locations for these businesses. New residential subdivisions should not be located near such uses to avoid potential conflicts over noise, dust or odors that these businesses may generate.

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.

D. Commercial Development near Designated and Future Growth Areas

In Talbot County and across the nation, commercial development along major roads once followed a pattern of individual businesses, served directly from the highway with individual, closely spaced driveways -- a pattern which impaired traffic safety and created roadway congestion. Such development characteristically made little allowance for open space or landscaping, obscured the rural viewsapes and contributed greatly to a loss of rural character.

Many of the County's existing commercial uses are located in the gateways to incorporated towns, with other scattered sites throughout growth areas. Gateways signal the transition between the rural and urban areas. They create the first impression of the community and should be attractive and well designed. 'Chain' commercial and retail architectural styles are discouraged in the gateway corridors.

Gateway overlay zoning adds design guidelines for new commercial development and is intended to ensure compatibility with the neighboring town's long-range vision for the corridor development. 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.

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.

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.

New commercial site design shall feature a unified streetscape with continuous street trees and sidewalks along the frontage, high quality landscaping and, where possible, planted medians to prevent unlimited left turns. A mix of housing and other uses near the shopping is desirable to begin creating a walkable neighborhood rather than a strictly 'auto-centric' district.

1. Design and Redevelopment

Design standards should be crafted to guide new construction and gradually transform commercial strip development into mixed-use centers. Minimum standards exist in State and County regulation to:

- a. Consolidate entrances along roadways to a few main driveways with internal service streets to connect between businesses;
- b. Provide for sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the area to create connections and safe passages between commercial businesses and nearby residential areas; and
- c. Require parking lots to be landscaped and screened from the roadways.

2. Building Design

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.

- a. Material should be of high architectural quality and should be selected for harmony with adjoining buildings.
- b. The height and scale of each new building should be compatible with its site and existing adjacent buildings.
- c. Building scale should be in conformance with neighboring development.
- d. Monotony of design in multiple building developments should be avoided. Adjacent buildings of different architectural styles should be made compatible by such means as screens, site breaks and materials.
- e. Mechanical equipment or other utility hardware on roof, ground or buildings should be screened from public view with material harmonious with the building, or be located so as to not be visible from public ways. Utility and service connections should be placed underground wherever possible.

3. Landscaping and Site Treatment

Landscaping should be provided to enhance architectural features and design. Landscaping on each site should be planned to provide an attractive transition along the streetscape, safe pedestrian movement, and screened parking areas. Landscaping or buffers should maximize the use of native plant materials over non-native vegetation to the greatest extent possible.

- a. Screening of service yards and other places that tend to be unsightly should be accomplished by use of walls, hedges, fencing, plantings, or an appropriate combination thereof. Screening should be effective in all seasons.
- b. Parking areas should be screened from public streets and paths. Parking areas and traffic ways should be enhanced with landscaped spaces containing trees or tree groupings.
- c. 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.
- d. Landscaping should be protected by appropriate curbs, tree guards or other devices in locations where susceptible to injury by pedestrian or motor traffic.
- e. Attractive landscape transitions to adjoining properties should be provided. In areas where vegetation or plantings will not do well, other materials such as fences, walls, and surfaces of wood, brick, stone, gravel and cobbles should be used.
- f. 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.
- g. Natural or existing topographic patterns should be preserved where they contribute to the beauty and utility of a development site.

4. Signage

Every sign should respect scale and proportion in its design and in its visual relationship to buildings and surroundings.

- a. Signs should be designed as integral elements of the building and site to which they relate.
- b. 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.
- c. The color, materials and lighting of every sign should be restrained and harmonious with the building and site to which it relates.
- d. The use of natural materials (wood, brick) for signs located in the agricultural and rural areas

is encouraged.

- e. Pylon and flashing signs should not be permitted. Monument signs are the preferred sign type.

Commercial Development Policies

9.10 The County should require new commercial development projects and the redevelopment of existing commercial centers to address this chapter's community design and appearance standards. Commercial and industrial development or redevelopment within the county should result in an overall enhancement to the appearance of the built environment.

9.11 The County will enforce standards for new development requiring vegetative buffers and landscaping along highway corridors.

III. Villages

Talbot County features 22 unincorporated villages dispersed geographically throughout the County. While most of the villages have some characteristics in common, many have developed differently over time.

Historically the villages served many different purposes. Some were founded as maritime communities, others as commercial centers and several were founded by former slaves.

Some have sewer service while others rely on septic systems. A few have a good deal of commercial activity while others have evolved into entirely residential communities. Several villages cover large land areas, others are small in size. Many villages consist of a historic center (structures over 100 years old), along with areas of more recent development.

Many villages were settled in an age when motor vehicles were few and workers walked from their homes to their nearby jobs or businesses. Around the turn of the Twentieth Century, visitors from cities throughout the mid-Atlantic traveled by steamboat and railroad to relax at the County's holiday resorts and boarding houses.

House lots in the center of most villages are generally narrow and elongated, and 1 acre in size or less. Homes range in size from large to small, typically with two stories, front porches and few other improvements apart from small outbuildings. Mature trees line the streets and lanes of most villages.

Ratios vary as to the number of homes serving as the owners' principal residences versus vacation homes and rental properties. Those villages directly on the Bay typically have more 'weekenders'. A number of stores and businesses once thrived in the villages and most have or had post offices. Businesses served village residents and supported a local economy. Today, few such amenities remain.

Villages have become a focus for replacing septic systems with sewer system connections because of failing and outmoded systems polluting local waters. Lots developed 100 years ago or longer -- often in areas with a high groundwater table -- are of inadequate size to support a functional septic drain field, and are of insufficient size to replace or upgrade failing systems. Villages represent concentrations of properties with marginal or failing septic systems, whose diversion to enhanced nutrient removal (ENR) sewage treatment would yield appreciable water quality benefits.

Through the years, Talbot County has acted to eliminate failing septic systems in several villages by extending sewer service from the St. Michaels wastewater treatment plant to the villages of Tunis Mills, Unionville, and Copperville, and later to Newcomb, Royal Oak and Bellevue. The village of Tilghman is served by its own treatment facility.

Extension of sewer service was conceived, planned, funded, and constructed to resolve public health problems caused by fecal contamination of shellfish waters.

A. Village Planning Process

The 2005 Comprehensive Plan included an implementation strategy to establish a method for undertaking a master planning process for each of the villages, in order to establish guidelines for future infill and redevelopment. The County Council established the Talbot County Village Center Board in response to concerns raised in the Plan for the vulnerability of the villages to excessive and incompatible development.

The Village Center Board also drafted a text amendment to the County Zoning Ordinance, creating two additional zoning classifications for villages. The Board recognized that the twenty-two villages vary significantly in their size, density, and diversity of land uses; and that a “one size fits all” approach of the existing Village Center zones did not adequately serve the needs of all of the villages.

Recognizing the special needs and desire of the villages to maintain their unique sense of place, the County Council adopted legislation in July, 2011 to create the following village zoning districts:

Village Center (VC) zoning provides mix of low to moderate intensity residential and commercial uses that serve the village residents. This district may have public water and/or sewer service and relatively small lots and higher densities. This designation presently applies to all villages.

Village Center Hamlet (VC2) is characterized by primarily low or moderate intensity residential with limited compatible commercial uses.

The **Village Center Residential (VC1)** provides for low or moderate density residential use. This district may have public water and/or sewer service; however, services should not be the basis for new development inconsistent with the existing village scale or character.

The three classifications listed in the Zoning Ordinance permit an increasingly diverse range of uses to better assure that new development is compatible with village scale and to achieve their village’s distinctive objectives. The Zoning Ordinance shall provide greater detail and characterization of the three village zoning districts to include density and bulk requirements. The general village provisions of this Plan shall be applied to all village zoning districts as appropriate for the classification.

Recognizing the unique character of each of the county’s villages, new development will ideally occur as infill or redevelopment of existing sites and be compatible with the surroundings. Where new construction is surrounded by existing historic buildings, building height and exterior materials should be harmonious with those of adjacent properties. Compatible uses should be permitted to coexist near one another.

B. Village Priorities

The Village Center Board has been charged with developing village master plans, with guidance from the Planning Department

Several villages have developed their own plans to reflect and preserve the diversity and individual

character of their respective communities.

These plans will be published separately from this Plan and will be made available to the public, as well as to the Planning Commissioners, for guidance in deliberations that may affect individual villages. The existing plans provide useful information that may assist County staff and organizations in future decision making. Plans can be found on the County website.

The following comments are derived from village plans and represent their common concerns.

1. Preserve Community Character

- a. Existing homes should be retained and preserved as long as possible.
- b. When re-development or in-fill occurs, new structures should be comparable in size and style with the existing homes.
- c. New construction shall be infill or limited peripheral development in keeping with the existing village's scale (see village discussion in Chapter 2, Land Use).
- d. The County encourages the renovation and repurpose of older storefront buildings in the villages for commercial purposes to serve local residents.

2. Encourage Compatible Activities

- a. Regulations should continue to permit and support the establishment of commercial business that can serve the local community while remaining consistent with the village's character and appearance.
- b. The County should ensure that residents affected by building permits, zoning variances, road work, and shore line proposals are proactively notified.
- c. The zoning ordinance provides a simple and effective way for villages to maintain or modify land uses to one of the alternate designations established for rural villages. Residents will have the opportunity to seek revision during Zoning Ordinance review subsequent to adoption of this Plan.

3. Strengthen the Sense of Community

- a. Village residents wish to recognize and embrace the benefits of their diverse populations, which includes multigenerational families and recent arrivals, full-time and part-time residents, working people and retirees, and people with a variety of religions and ethnic backgrounds.
- b. The County should encourage and support efforts by village residents to convey their particular heritage within and beyond the communities through the use of websites, publications, and social media and marketing.

4. Assure Pleasant, Safe and Adequate Public Facilities

- a. The County should protect its considerable investment in village parks and recreational facilities and watercraft landings by supporting a strategy for continuous supervision and maintenance.
- b. The County should continue to insure that the maintenance and improvements to infrastructure will benefit the safety, health, and quality of life for its residents.
- c. Post Offices are important institutions to the character of villages and the lives of village residents. Every effort should be made to prevent further losses, and to retain village post offices wherever possible.

d. The County should continue to seek means of providing sewer services to villages where possible, to improve environmental quality.

5. Maintain a Safe and Secure Village

- a. Speed limits within all villages should be set at safe and reasonable rates. Streets should be appropriately scaled to help slow automobile traffic through villages, and provide a safe atmosphere for pedestrians.
- b. Entry signs and road signs are important reminders to drivers as well as helping to delineate the village from the open land. Appropriate signage should be commissioned for Village Centers.
- c. Village residents should be assured of adequate response times and patrol coverage by enforcement and emergency services.

6. Protect and Improve Environmental Quality

- a. Village residents expect that County and state agencies will continue to improve management of stormwater for quality of runoff entering the waterways, and to ensure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.
- b. Village residents are encouraged to educate themselves about ways to safeguard the natural resources of their community and where practical, engage in conservation landscaping.
 - c. Village residents should strive where applicable, to maintain shorelines and prevent erosion with the least amount of environmental disturbance.
- d. The County should identify and develop incentives to owners of undeveloped properties surrounding villages to sell or donate conservation easements in order to protect rural character and provide a clear delineation between village and countryside, while retaining value for landowners.

7. Other Village Concerns

- a. Village residents should encourage and support the continued viability of commercial watermen and farmers, small businesses and service providers of appropriate scale and scope.
- b. Village residents should encourage the development of programs enabling convenient and economical travel to other parts of the County and beyond, through ride sharing and public transportation programs.

C. Village Design Guidelines

This guidelines section is carried forward from the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. This section includes some recommendations that may be considered as part of the development review process and some suggested design elements.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Village Planning Areas are Master Planned areas with suitable land available for infill, redevelopment and new development. Master Plans, or small area plans, are required to evaluate traffic, emergency response and other infrastructure impacts of development on village character. The plans also provide a general understanding among residents on the nature and scale of proposed development.

Village character can be described by types of uses, building heights, massing and setbacks, and lot size and configuration. Community design characteristics include such elements as landscaping and vegetation, signage, lighting, location of parking and garages, and roadway character.

1. Villages should continue to have a mix of residential, small-scale commercial, civic and institutional uses. Infill development should be compatible with the existing building height, massing and front and side setbacks. New and infill buildings should conform to the prevailing setbacks to enhance traditional street-to-building relationships. All development should be sensitive to community character and existing development patterns.
2. 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 provide both street trees and street front landscaping consisting of a mix of trees and shrubs.
3. Commercial and industrial uses adjacent to residential or lower intensity nonresidential uses should be buffered by landscaping or screening.
4. In villages where on-street parking is permitted, off-street parking for infill retail and commercial development should, wherever possible, be located to the rear of the building. When off-street parking is provided to the side of commercial buildings, the parking area should be screened by a mix of trees, hedges, fencing, shrubs, or an appropriate combination of any of the above. Sidewalks and pedestrian paths should be provided where appropriate, and if specified in the village master plan.
5. Residential and commercial lighting should be specified, and generally pedestrian in scale, to maintain the rural character of the villages and to prevent excessive illumination or glare onto neighboring properties or public ways.
6. Commercial signs in Village Centers should be oriented to pedestrians and people in slow moving vehicles. The size, materials, color, lettering, placement, and illumination should respect the unique character of existing buildings and be designed as an integral architectural element.
7. Commercial outdoor storage areas, exposed machinery and outdoor areas used for storage and collection of trash should be visually screened from roads and surrounding uses. This does not include the personal property or equipment of watermen, farmers or other residents who are not regulated as cottage industries. Storage yard requirements for landscape materials and other cottage industries are specified in the County Zoning Ordinance.
8. Roadways through and in villages should be of the appropriate width and function. Many villages are served by substandard roads and therefore present development challenges. The County should facilitate the location of utility easements within public rights-of-way, and the collocation of utilities within easements. Utility and service connections should be placed underground wherever possible, where they may be protected from ice, wind or other conditions that may disrupt service.

Village Design Policies

9.12 New development and redevelopment in villages should be compatible with existing character in terms of land use, density, scale, setbacks, site layout, mix of use, and general design to maintain their unique “sense of place.” In Village Planning Areas, Master Plans shall be required for review of small scale and major subdivision, and major site plans. Master Planning shall include a comprehensive study addressing compatibility and suitability of existing and proposed land uses, infrastructure, facilities and services associated with new development and redevelopment.

9.13 New village residential development and infill should be designed to be compatible with and

complement that of the adjacent or surrounding community.

9.14 The County will review permitted land uses in the village zoning districts to ensure that those uses that are compatible with the existing village character will be permitted in the future. Review will include development of Master Plans to guide proposed new development in villages.

9.15 The County will review permitted density and bulk requirements for all village zoning districts. Consideration of village rezoning shall be completed through the comprehensive mapping process keeping in mind the unique character of each village.

9.16 The County will work to revise sewer connection and allocation policies in Water Quality Strategy Areas mapped Tier III-B to concentrate available capacity on addressing existing failing, inadequate and substandard septic systems within villages and allow for infill, redevelopment and new development on existing lots of record within established sewer service areas.

IV. Summary

In most instances, the land use and zoning regulations established since the 1970s have served to protect Talbot County's agricultural and maritime heritage, rural character and unique relationship with the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Talbot County has established general design guidelines in order to retain character while allowing for appropriately scaled growth in carefully selected areas, which are reflected in planning areas and zoning designations.

Designated Growth Areas are intended to support development at a scale and density appropriate to future urbanized areas. Until such time as land is annexed into an adjacent town, design guidelines seek to maintain the rural character of these areas.

Throughout the Rural Reserve Area, agriculture is the preferred use. Low density, single-family housing is also permitted, in settings that minimize potential conflicts with agricultural activities.

Development guidelines for non-residential structures recommend limiting development to gateway corridors, expansion of existing developments, or neighborhood centers proposed in conjunction with a residential community. Non-residential development should be compatible with the scale and character of the adjoining town. Treatments for such development should emphasize the relationship of a proposed building to its site; relationship to adjoining buildings and sites; site landscaping; building design; signs and maintenance.

Villages, like other areas of the County, are subject to zoning regulations for purposes of environmental management, preservation of character, public safety, etc. Many villages have changed significantly since village zoning was first established, evolving from bustling commercial centers to quieter residential neighborhoods. Zoning designations and sometimes conflicting regulations that have been superimposed on the entire group of villages are overdue for reconciliation.

Village policies are especially relevant in the context of environmental regulations and concerns discussed throughout this Plan. Updated village zoning will be critical to the County's Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs). Many villages are also in low lying areas and so are vulnerable to storm surge and sea level rise. Therefore, development decisions must take these potential impacts into account.

The comprehensive planning process provides all county citizens with an opportunity to participate in the reevaluation of design standards in order to ensure that principles of good community design are maintained.