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# Introduction



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The Talbot County Comprehensive Plan is the result of thoughtful discussions and effort by many citizen and stakeholder groups to focus on the County’s long-range future. The Plan presents a range of visions for Talbot County in the coming decades and outlines a framework for consistent decision making to bring those visions to fruition.

The Comprehensive Plan provides policy guidance for public officials and citizens who will shape the County’s growth and development over the next twenty years. This Plan is an update of the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. The format and some content have been reorganized and there are a few new items that have been adopted by the Talbot County Council as amendments to the 2005 Plan.

Maryland’s HB 297 Smart, Green and Growing—Smart and Sustainable Growth Act of 2009 requires that in order for an action to be consistent with a comprehensive plan:

*“the term shall be defined to mean an action taken that will further, and not be contrary to, the following items in the plan:*

1. *Policies;*
2. *Timing of the implementation of the plan;*
3. *Timing of development;*

4. *Timing of rezoning;*
5. *Development patterns;*
6. *Land uses; and*
7. *Densities or intensities.”*

This act requires implementation measures to be consistent with the above components of this plan.

The Plan encourages citizens to take an active role in planning, encourages greater cooperation between the County and Towns and provides strong recommendations for the protection of the County’s key assets including sensitive environmental resources and rural lands. The policies outlined in each chapter attempt to strike a balance between competing interests for the community’s best interest.

## **I. Purpose of the Plan**

The Talbot County Comprehensive Plan is an official public document created by the community and adopted by the County Council. It is the policy guide for public officials and citizens who will oversee the County’s growth and development. It is also the guide for other public policy decisions and will help the County determine when and where new public facilities and improvements are needed.

The Plan is comprehensive because it covers a broad range of elements related to growth and development, preservation and sustainability. Its recommendations are broad, rather than narrowly defining specific land use decisions. Policies may be amended as circumstances change over time, without straying from the basic goals of the Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan is not a development ordinance, but sets the framework and basis for the County's Zoning Ordinance and other development regulations, including amendments to existing ordinances.

Talbot County's first major Comprehensive Plan was prepared in 1973 and was updated in 1990 and again in 1997. The 2005 Comprehensive Plan replaced the County's 1997 Plan as the guiding document for the County's planning efforts. This document is based on the 2005 Plan and this review began in 2011.

## **II. Comprehensive Plan Process**

The 2005 Plan was the product of citizens, the Planning Commission, County Council, County staff and consultants and evolved through a series of citizen committees, work sessions and public hearings.

This edition reviews the extensive document adopted in 2005. Committees comprised of stakeholder organizations and citizens reviewed the contents of each chapter and assessed the County's progress towards achieving the goals of the Plan.

For the 2005 Plan, over 100 citizen committee members expressed growing County-wide concerns about the rate of growth and change that had been occurring. The committees reaffirmed the County's long term commitment to environmental and critical area protection and articulated the desire to retain the rural character of the community by managing growth to prevent sprawl and to protect agriculture as a primary industry.

## **III. Organization of the Plan**

The Comprehensive Plan is organized into nine chapters. Chapters One provides context and background information. The remaining chapters contain plan elements organized in related topic areas. In practice, concerns and topics overlap and may not be thoroughly discussed in a single chapter.

Each chapter begins with statements of visions and goals followed by a discussion of existing conditions, circumstances and programs. Policies are listed under major sections of each chapter.

## **IV. Legal Basis for Planning**

Talbot County is a Charter County and as such derives its authority for planning from the Annotated Code of Maryland and the County Charter of 1974.

The Land Use Article, revised, clarified and passed by the Maryland General assembly in 2012, enables local governments to guide growth and development; outlines the responsibilities, roles and functions of the Planning Commission and Board of Appeals; and sets the 'ground rules' for planning and zoning.

The *Smart and Sustainable Growth Act of 2009* clarifies the requirement for consistency between local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances. The definition of consistency applies to zoning ordinances, special exceptions, annexations, water and sewer amendments and Critical Area growth allocation. All must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.



The Land Use Article requires that comprehensive plans address certain components of the jurisdiction's vision, including:

1. Goals and Objectives as a guide for the development and economic and social well being;
2. A land use element which outlines the most appropriate and desirable patterns of growth and development;
3. A transportation element describing the entire spectrum of transportation facilities applicable to the jurisdiction;
4. A community facilities element which identifies public and semi-public buildings, lands and facilities;
5. A mineral resources element including land use policies to balance resource extraction with other land uses;
6. A development regulations section that identifies development tools to implement the plan;
7. A section which includes recommendations for areas of critical State concern and a sensitive areas element to protect sensitive areas from the adverse effects of development;
8. A fisheries element designating areas for loading, unloading, and processing finfish and shellfish, and for docking and mooring commercial fishing boats and vessels;
9. A water resources element to identify drinking water supplies needed, suitable receiving waters for wastewater and stormwater management and a development capacity analysis; and
10. An implementation section to recommend regulations for land development and encouraging streamlined review of applications for development in areas designated for growth.

The planning context for future development in Talbot County must also take into consideration the role that the County will play in implementing the overall growth management policies established by the Planning Act of 1992 and subsequent legislation.

## V. Maryland's Twelve Planning Visions

As part of the 2009 *Smart, Green & Growing* legislation, the General Assembly modernized the state's previous planning visions with 12 new visions to more broadly represent state policies. The following visions provide the framework for this Plan:

1. Quality of Life and Sustainability--A high quality of life is achieved through universal stewardship of the land, water, and air resulting in sustainable communities and protection of the environment;
2. Public Participation--Citizens are active partners in the planning and implementation of community initiatives and are sensitive to their responsibilities in achieving community goals;
3. Growth Areas--Growth is concentrated in existing population and business centers, growth areas adjacent to these centers, or strategically selected new centers;
4. Community Design--Compact, mixed-use, walkable design - consistent with existing community character and located near available or planned transit options- is encouraged to ensure efficient use of land and transportation resources and preservation and enhancement of natural systems, open spaces, recreational areas, and historical, cultural, and archeological resources;
5. Infrastructure--Growth areas have the water resources and infrastructure to accommodate population and business expansion in an orderly, efficient, and environmentally sustainable manner;
6. Transportation--A well-maintained, multimodal transportation system facilitates the safe, convenient, affordable, and efficient movement of people, goods, and services within and between population and business centers;
7. Housing--A range of housing densities, types, and sizes provides residential options for citizens of all ages and incomes;
8. Economic Development--Economic development and natural resource-based businesses that promote employment opportunities for all income levels within the capacity of the State's natural resources, public services, and public facilities are encouraged;
9. Environmental Protection--Land and water resources, including the Chesapeake and coastal bays, are carefully managed to restore and maintain healthy air and water, natural systems, and living resources;
10. Resource Conservation--Waterways, forests, agricultural areas, open space, natural systems, and scenic areas are conserved;
11. Stewardship--Government, business entities, and residents are responsible for the creation of sustainable communities by collaborating to balance efficient growth with resource protection; and
12. Implementation--Strategies, policies, programs, and funding for growth and development, resource conservation, infrastructure, and transportation are integrated across the local, regional, state, and interstate levels to achieve these Visions.

## VI. Relationship to Other County Planning Documents

The Comprehensive Plan is not a stand-alone document, but is supported by (and, in turn supports) related planning program documents including:

- Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Plan
- Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plan
- Land Preservation and Recreation Plan
- Floodplain Ordinance
- Zoning, Subdivision and Land Development (Zoning Ordinance)
- Septic Tier maps (SB 236)
- Roads Ordinance
- Forest Conservation Ordinance
- Building Code
- Livability Code
- Stormwater Management Ordinance

These and other plans and ordinances must be in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan. However, as with any update or revision of a major planning document, conflicts may arise between previously adopted policies and newly proposed policies. The policies and guidelines contained within this Comprehensive Plan supersede any conflicting policies and/or guidelines contained in the above mentioned plans. See the list of links to related State regulations and other guidance, at the end of this chapter.

The Talbot County Comprehensive Plan takes into consideration the comprehensive development plans and ordinances of the incorporated municipalities within the County. The Plan also refers to applicable State plans and ordinances which affect the growth and development of Talbot County.

Under the Talbot County Charter, the Planning Commission makes advisory recommendations to the Planning Officer and the County Council relating to the Comprehensive Plan. The

Planning Officer also has the continuing responsibility and duty of making recommendations to the Council for the revision of the Comprehensive Plan. The Talbot County Council has the ultimate authority to determine the content of the Comprehensive Plan, taking the Planning Commission's advisory recommendations and the Planning Officer's recommendations into account.

## VII. Implementation

The Comprehensive Plan is a policy document guiding public and private land use decisions and will be implemented through a variety of regulatory and financial tools.

Comprehensive plans are implemented through the zoning ordinance, and other county planning and regulatory documents, the capital improvement program, state and federal regulations and funding, and non-regulatory programs such as voluntary land management programs.

Talbot County has, over time, implemented a number of progressive growth management strategies that have begun to direct the pace and location of development. This Plan recommends further implementation strategies to better manage the density and location of growth, improve environmental quality, and ensure the provision of public facilities that meet the changing needs of residents and reduce the burden on existing residents of expanding public infrastructure.

To monitor progress in achieving the goals and strategies of this Plan, the Planning Commission and Planning Officer may establish a process to review the effectiveness of regulatory and non-regulatory tools and make recommendations to the County Council when appropriate, which the Council may or may not approve as it sees fit.



The Planning Commission and Planning Officer, in the course of their duties, periodically review and update indicators of change. On an annual basis, the Planning Commission and Planning Officer reports on indicators of growth to the Maryland Department of Planning and to the public. Review and analysis of short term changes is an important step in evaluating and predicting potential shifts in the Plan's assumptions.

The Planning Commission and Planning Officer should maintain a dynamic relationship with the incorporated towns to review proposed developments in the designated growth areas. Managing the density and design of growth in population centers is critical to the success of the Plan's overarching goal to protect the rural character of the County.

Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan may be needed over time depending on new initiatives, more detailed planning, changes in growth projections, or changes in government policies. While annual review will provide indicators of short term changes, significant changes in development trends frequently take more years to become apparent. The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be long-range, establishing goals policies and implementation strategies that will be accomplished in five to twenty years. Further, within ten years this edition of the plan will be reviewed and updated as circumstances require. Chapter 1 follows and provides the demographic and statistical background which provides some basic parameters and projections for this plan.

## VIII. Comprehensive Planning Resources

The references below are provided for informational purposes and are not part of this Comprehensive Plan. Rather, the sites may supplement the information found in this document.

Maryland Department of Planning, *Local Government Planning*

<http://planning.maryland.gov/OurWork/localplanning.shtml>

Maryland Department of the Environment, overview of regulatory authority

<http://www.mde.state.md.us/programs/regulations/Pages/index.aspx>

University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center

*Sustainable Maryland*

<http://sustainablemaryland.com/>

Maryland Department of Agriculture, *Resource Conservation*

[www.mda.maryland.gov/resource conservation](http://www.mda.maryland.gov/resource%20conservation)

Maryland Historical Trust

<http://mht.maryland.gov/governments.html>

Maryland Emergency Management Agency

<http://memm.maryland.gov/pages/default.aspx>

Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development

<http://dhcd.maryland.gov/website/programs>

Maryland State Highway Administration

[www.roads.maryland.gov](http://www.roads.maryland.gov)

American Planning Association,

*community planning*

[www.planning.org/community](http://www.planning.org/community)